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VOL. CCCCXXIII.

THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

Craik, Mrs. Dinah Maria (Mulock)

THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY.

A NOVEL.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "JOHN HALIFAX."

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1858.

I DEDICATE THIS BOOK

TO NO PERSONAL FRIEND, BUT TO ONE WHO HAS FOR YEARS BEEN THE GOOD INFLUENCE OF MY LIFE. NOTHING SHE KNOWS, OR EVER MAY KNOW OF ME. YET IT PLEASES ME TO OFFER THIS NOVEL TO A WOMAN, THE MERE NAMING OF WHOM INCLUDES AND TRANSCENDS ALL PRAISE, —

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY.

VOL. I.

CHAPTER I.

NINIAN GRÆME stood at his own door, waiting for it to be opened unto him; — the sooner the better, any one would have thought who noted the miserable weather without. The little square — it was one of those dull spots in the New Town of Edinburgh, where grass grows among the pavement-stones, and the very sparrows seem half asleep — was filled with a dense white mist, rare indeed to the clear atmosphere of the hill-city, but when it does come, fraught with intense cold that pierces to one's very soul. Yet Ninian did not seem to feel it. He stood, looking down the blank street of which his own abode made the corner-house. But he evidently saw nothing — at least with his outward eyes.

At length, turning round, his attention was caught by the bright brass door-plate, on which was inscribed, "Professor Græme." He gave a momentary start, and his close-set lips quivered once or twice; but soon he resumed the quiet manly bearing which seemed habitual to him.

The maid opened the door. "Are they come?" was Ninian's hasty question.

"Eh, sir? Na, na, it's no the time. At sax o'clock, Miss Græme said —"

"Yes — you're right, Katie," answered the young man, as he unrolled himself from his damp plaid and hung it to dry. In so doing, he knocked down a heavy oaken stick, which he took up, touching it tenderly, while the same passing pang troubled his countenance.

"Here — put this by somewhere — in my room," he said, in a whisper. "And, Katie," — he half-opened the front door and pointed to the brass plate, then added with an effort, as though mute actions came easier to him than words, "see that this is taken off — early, mind! before my sisters can see it to-morrow morning."

"I will do that, Mr. Ninian — or Mr. Græme, as ye are the noo," answered Katie, in a subdued tone, as she disappeared with her apron to her eyes.

Ninian went up-stairs to his sister. She sat by the fire sewing a dress of some mourning material commoner than the one she wore. Her occupation, together with a certain pallor and gravity in her look, and an indescribable yet unmistakable gloom which hung over the whole house, indicated that this was a home which had been lately visited by the dread Guest who must come at times to all.

As Mr. Græme entered, the sister looked up and smiled; — no, not exactly smiled, but a pleasantness came over her features. It was evident that Ninian was one of those whose presence brings light at all times and under all circumstances. She put down her work and came to him.

"You are not wet, are you? It is a dreary day."

"Indeed, I wish the children had had a better one for their journey, or that I could have fetched them

myself. Are all things ready for them at home, Lindsay?"

"Quite ready."

"I need scarcely have asked that question of Our Sister," said Ninian; and his manner expressed affection, quiet, indeed, but perfectly at rest and sure — so sure, that no outward show was asked or needed.

"Will you dine now? or have dinner and tea together when the children arrive? I thought you would like that best, brother?"

"Certainly!"

The colloquy ceased. Brief and subdued it was, as if they tried to speak on ordinary topics, and just as usual — both feeling over them the shadow of some heavy thought, which each, for the other's sake, tried to lift off, and could not.

"It is nearly dark, Lindsay. Had you not better put your work away?"

She did so — mechanically — as if simply because Ninian desired her. She was evidently accustomed to do as he said in everything. Then the brother and sister both sank into silence, sitting on either side the fire. Grey shadows crept over the room, in the dark corners, and about the vacant chairs; but still at the hearth where they two sat it was warm and bright.

They were very like one another, though Lindsay Græme was apparently some years the elder. Neither were handsome — in fact, to Ninian might reasonably be applied that adjective which Southrons often give to a thoroughly Scottish face — hard-featured. All the lines were bold, clear, and somewhat rugged, though he was still a young man. But he had that which to his sex is worth ten times more than beauty of feature — a

stature combining height, strength, dignity, and grace. Yet his was not an ugly physiognomy either. It was a sort of face that you would instinctively trust. Looking at it, you could put your whole worldly estate, your life itself, into his hands, and feel that all were in safe keeping. In fact, a runaway bankrupt, his debtor too, once did so. And Ninian was faithful to the trust, even though it entailed upon him perpetual trouble in settling the affairs of the absent defaulter, and in exercising some show of authority over two most refractory boys and one girl, who from their London boarding-schools kept up a perpetual warfare with their unseen Scottish guardian.

Lindsay — her likeness shall follow after her brother's, as, despite her seniority, she ever followed in sweet humility — Lindsay Græme was — just a woman, nothing less, and nothing more! She never was and never had been thought clever or beautiful, and now she had passed the age when she cared to be thought either. Also, there was at times a look in her face, which seemed as if not age alone had produced the softened calm it wore — this sealing up of all youth's restless emotions into one serene repose. Whatever trouble had swept over her, it had left no bitterness, no heartlessness, scarcely even grief. It was probably that one — the most sanctifying woe of all — when the angel of death, reascending, opens heaven, and suffers a portion of heaven's light to fall on those looking sorrowfully upwards, whose faces, like that of Moses, bear some trace of this brightness evermore.

For her outward appearance, it was just ordinary enough; you would not notice her, except, perhaps, for the grave neatness of her black dress — she always

wore black; or for a certain sweetness in her voice, which ever pierced through the Babel of all other voices in the room, like a drop of clear water falling on a crystal floor. For the rest of her looks, she had a fair skin, flaxen hair, that would always be flaxen — never grey. She generally wore a sort of half-cap of black lace, which though she probably did not know it, was the most becoming head-tire a lady of her age and complexion could have chosen.

Nothing broke the silence, except the occasional falling of a coal from the fire, or the cat jumping from her doze on the hearth up to Ninian's knee, whence she was not displaced. It argues well for a young man's disposition when he is amicably disposed towards dumb animals — especially cats.

"Half an hour yet!" said Ninian, looking at his watch. "I can walk to the coach-office in ten minutes; but it is better to be before than after the time. Let us have tea quite ready, and the fire bright. I want the children to feel that they have come home — to a cheerful home."

"You are right, brother, quite right. *He* would have said so."

"I think he would. And since they are younger than we, and have been away during all the trouble which we two have shared together, we cannot expect them to feel exactly as we do. And now they are coming home, we must try to make it a happy home to them, as it was in our father's lifetime."

"Yes, Ninian, we will. And we must never let them feel that there is not the full tie of blood between us and them, remembering that our father was their father, and that their mother is dead as well as ours."

So spoke Lindsay, in a low voice, as she stood leaning by the hearth; the light shining on her hands, that hung down loosely linked together, her face being hid in shadow, as it always seemed to be when she betrayed more emotion than her ordinary life expressed.

There was no more said between the brother and sister, and Ninian soon rose and went down stairs. But ere leaving the house he came up once more. Lindsay was still standing by the fire, her hands folded — that quiet passive attitude into which they seemed naturally to fall. It was her habit; one of the many outward tokens of inward character.

Ninian went up to his sister and kissed her — but gravely, as if it were a rare thing between them. She leant her head on his shoulder for a minute, and then followed him to the hall-door. From thence she went down to the kitchen and up to the drawing-room, busying herself in all housewifely preparations until that most nondescript, abundant, and agreeable meal — a Scotch tea-dinner — was smiling on the board. This done, she went and stood by the fire in her old attitude, from the which she never moved until the loud ring at the door-bell announced that "the children" were come.

It was a decided misnomer to call them *children.* The two eldest — I speak advisedly, for one glance proclaimed them twins — were "sonsie lassies" (no other term will suit them so well), apparently about twenty. There was another girl, who was evidently that fortunate, fairy-gifted one, the "youngest princess" of the family; and there were two or three boys, scattered in and about the line of girls for which the Græme family had once been renowned, until in the late Professor's household the numbers of each sex became nearly equal.

Altogether, there were six to be counted. Ninian stood at the door and let them pass him by, one by one, to receive the greeting of "Our Sister," as Lindsay was called *par excellence*. It seemed to be a tacit agreement, that while the others had their various Christian names, Ruth and Esther, Edmund, Christina, Reuben, Charles, bandied about under all sorts of odd nicknames and diminutives, Ninian and Lindsay were emphatically called "Brother" and "Sister."

The whole tribe had rushed in from their journey with a tired forgetfulness of everything but the relief of coming home; and for some minutes the house was alive with voices; Katie, poor old soul! being summoned hither and thither till it almost drove her crazy. But when, one after the other, the young travellers assembled to tea in the old familiar room — where everything looked the same, save for the one missing presence that would be among them no more — then a great quietness came over all. The twins crept nearer to each other, and Christina, ever the readiest either to laugh or weep, hid her face on Lindsay's shoulder. But no one spoke a word.

They gathered round the table — Lindsay sitting where she had presided for some years as mistress of her father's household. Opposite to her was that father's empty chair. Each glanced that way, and then all eyes were lowered. None looked up, and all kept silence as Ninian came in and took the vacant place. There was a pause — as if each waited for the ever silenced voice; and then Ninian, in his low quiet tones, said the grace:

"*Lord, we thank Thee for these and all Thy mercies; and forgive us our sins, for Christ's sake. Amen.*"

And all felt this to be the token whereby their

brother took upon himself the duties, responsibilities, and rights of eldership, and became henceforth the Head of the Family.

It was a goodly sight — as indeed it always is — to see what may truly be termed a Family! Israel's king surely knew it, when he likened it to a table set round about with olive-branches — always a fairer table than one without. Perhaps Ninian, too, thought thus; and after the first sorrowful cloud had passed away from the circle, it was with a sense not only of duty but of pleasure that he looked round on his young brothers and sisters, having a kindly and a cheerful word for each.

"Well, and what sort of a journey was it? You must have nearly filled the coach yourselves."

"We wanted all to come outside," said Ruth, the one of the twins who generally took the lead, in virtue of a more serious demeanour, and fifteen minutes' more experience of life than her sister Esther. "We thought," she added, looking down, "that now we ought to be more careful of expense. But our friends at Lanark overruled all, and took places for us girls inside."

"And much good their kindness was to Tinie, at least," said Reuben, an old-fashioned-looking, mathematical-headed little fellow, whose face might indicate any age from thirteen to thirty. "Tinie actually insisted on coming outside before we had travelled half-way, though we were driving through a mist that I could almost have cut with a knife."

"Tinie! Tinie!" said Ninian, with a reproachful shake of the head to the lassie who sat next to him, the "youngest princess" — and a creature beautiful and blithe as youngest princesses always happen to be; in

fact, the flower of the family, so far as looks went, and as such evidently worn by "Our Brother" in his heart of hearts.

"I couldn't help it," pouted Tinie's pretty lips. "It was so dull inside, and Ruth and Esther did nothing but talk to one another, which they always do, telling me to 'go out of the way, as I'm only a child.' A child, indeed!"

"You ought not to behave like a child, then," answered the grave Reuben, "and especially before a minister. Mr. Forsyth travelled with us, brother; and I'm sure he must have been shocked at the way she went on, chattering like a magpie."

"I always do so on principle to douce, quiet, saint-like young men of his description. It rouses them, and brings them down to the level of this world. For the same reason I shall keep on pulling Edmund's hair occasionally" — and she suited the action to the word — "or else, as now, he'll be floating off into the clouds, and we shall hear no more of him."

Edmund, poor victim, turned round with a patient air and a "What did you want, Christina?" He had a more thoughtful look than any of them, and in his face was the delicate beauty of boyhood. The features were good — the mouth especially; but its form, while indicating great sensitiveness and susceptibility, had a want of firmness in the lines, from which a physiognomist would augur ill. In short, no one could much observe Edmund Græme without a feeling of interest and affection (for his sweet nature was evident in his whole mien), nor yet without a certain anxious looking forward to the problem of life which the boy had yet to solve — the great battle of life which he had yet to fight.

No embryo genius was ever a prophet in his own country. As Edmund woke up from his reverie, a smile

went round the circle; and when, with varying colour and knitted brows, he began desperately wielding his knife and fork, the smile grew into a titter. Especially as Charlie, the wag and scapegrace of the family — in every family there is always one — took advantage of the conclusion of the meal to mount guard behind "Ned's" chair, and there perform a succession of heroic and sentimental attitudes for the especial amusement of every one but the unconscious youth himself.

— Of every one, save Ninian, who had been called away, and Lindsay, who sat by the fireside in her usual place. A momentary shade troubled her countenance as she regarded the young group, saying to herself, "Two months — and forgotten already." But she knew that youth is youth — transient even in its deepest emotions; and that God meant it should be so. Otherwise, which of us could ever bear life's burden into middle age?

Ninian soon re-entered the room. They were all collected round the fire, some sitting, some standing. One only place was left vacant — the great leather arm-chair, which the father had used to fill. Charlie, with his customary thoughtlessness, was about to take possession of it, by jumping in all-fours; but Reuben had held him back, whispering something which made them all grow silent and grave.

"Any room for me, children?" asked Ninian, as he stood on the outside of the circle round the fire. The younger boys answered by moving the arm-chair to its olden spot, while Edmund took his brother by the hand and placed him in it. It was a mute acknowledgment from them all of the double relation which he was in future to hold — elder brother and father.

Ninian evidently felt it. He sat down; held his

hand over his eyes for a few moments; then his grave, quiet, affectionate smile lightened around on them all, and each knew without more words that the family bond was sealed.

They soon seated themselves round the fire; Lindsay at her work, the twins lounging together on the sofa, and Tinie crouched on the hearth-rug, her two little hands folded over Ninian's knee. Edmund sat opposite, leaning on his elbows, and looking dreamily into the fire. Which said fire Reuben also contemplated with equal intentness, though with different motives, being evidently bent on making discoveries in gas; for whenever a small jet of flame appeared, he poked at it with such determined energy, that the peace of the rest of the company was considerably disturbed. Charlie also contributed a few of those trifling annoyances which seem necessary clouds to diversify the beauty of the family atmosphere; amusing himself at intervals by awakening the cat, and hunting her from corner to corner with a vivacity of delight, which proved the truth of the celebrated remark, "that man's natural propensity was to hunt *something*."

An hour or two passed in this manner, and then, when some chance allusion had made the conversation grow serious and subdued, Ninian said gravely:

"Children," — he frequently called them "children," though not in an overbearing tone, with a sort of loving eldership — "there are a few things I want to talk to you about, or rather for us all to talk over together. Shall we do so now, or defer it until another time?"

They all answered, "Now!"

"I think so too; there is nothing like doing what must be done at once. We cannot know the future. Little we thought, when we so rejoiced over our father's

appointment to that astronomical expedition, that he would never return to us from it, but that his grave would be in a foreign land."

A mournful silence ensued; Tinie's face was lowered, while her hand sought convulsively that of her elder brother. He took and kept it — though he was unused to caressing moods. But perhaps, looking down upon her, he remembered that she had been all her life her father's darling. So he made no more allusion to the now silent name.

"You will easily understand, children, that our loss makes a great difference in the family income; for though Lindsay has her mother's little fortune, and I my profession, still we shall not be rich, for a man cannot gain much by the law until he is far older and more established in the world than I am. Then we must consider Edmund's and Reuben's classes, and Charlie's school; for I am sure that we would all wish our three brothers to be educated as our father intended, even though we should each have to make some little sacrifice for the same."

The girls answered with a cheerful "Yes" — all except Lindsay. Her sacrifices were never made in words — and everybody knew that, or guessed it. For Lindsay was the only one among them who was "independent;" and many an envious grudge might there have been awakened in the younger sisters, had she not borne her dignities so meekly; while all felt, though none ever saw, the continual generosity of her hand.

"Then, brother," said Reuben, looking up with his serious old man's expression — it was allowed that in Reuben's queer little head was the chief wisdom of the family — "what are we to do? If I might advise —"

"Do so; it will be always open council here," said Ninian, smiling.

"Then, I think, if we went from this house to one not half so large and fine, and sold all this grand furniture and knick-knackery, and poetry-books and pictures, that are of no use to anybody —"

Here Edmund turned round with an alarmed, appealing air. "Brother Ninian? —"

"— And chemical library, and scientific and astronomical instruments," continued Ninian, taking up the word with a humorous glance at Reuben, who stopped, confounded. "No, my boys," he added seriously; "whatever renunciations we make shall be equal on all sides. But Reuben's plan is in a great degree the one which I had almost settled in my own mind. Only I wish to do nothing without the knowledge and agreement of my brothers and sisters."

He then explained to them that he could rent from a client, on easy terms, a large old-fashioned house very near Edinburgh, which would be a pleasant and convenient home for them all for years to come. They all caught at the idea with the eagerness of youth, and very soon they had coaxed from Ninian a full description of the entire domicile, where Reuben planned a laboratory, Edmund a study, and the twins a flower-garden, while Charlie exulted in the prospect of certain ghost-ridden galleries suitable for play in the day-time, and for frightening people at night.

"And Our Sister is quite satisfied too?" said Ruth at last. Yes! Our Sister not only agreed, but had already gone over the house, and pronounced it good. So after a little more consultation — nominal, indeed, but which pleased and flattered the children, and impressed them,

as Ninian wished, with the feeling that his sway over them was not to be an exaction of blind obedience, but of guiding influence — the whole matter was decided.

On retiring to rest, Ninian once more gathered his household together, to take upon him, for the first time, a duty ever religiously observed by his father; for Professor Græme came of blood that, in the sorrowful days of Covenanting warfare, had dyed purple the Scottish hills. There, as priest of the family flock, self-consecrated, the young man knelt, with his brothers and sisters round him. His voice, at first tremulous, and always low, was touched with a solemnity that showed how deeply he felt the vow he then made in his heart, to be a father unto the fatherless evermore.

They all rose up. Instinctively, one after the other, they went and said good-night to Ninian, as they had been accustomed to do to their father — then all disappeared, except the eldest sister. Lindsay stood, her candle in her hand.

"All is well, Ninian. This first night —" She paused — stopped — but the brother and sister understood one another. He smiled; she looked up to him, as if trying to express the great love and reverence there was in her heart — ay, reverence, though he was so much younger than she. But she could not. So they shook hands, bade one another good-night, and Lindsay followed after the rest.

But until long past midnight, till the lamp flickered and went out, and there was but a handful of red cinders left of the fire — Ninian sat there, pondering on the charge he had undertaken, on all that lay before him to renounce, to perform, and to endure.

CHAPTER II.

"WELL, brother, and what is to be done?" asked Lindsay Græme, handing across the breakfast-table a letter which Ninian had given her to read. Whereupon the children were all alive immediately; and their curiosity was only deepened by observing that both their brother and sister looked decidedly perplexed. At last Christina, who sat at Ninian's side — a place she seemed to have taken of right — ventured in a pretty wilful way to peep over his shoulder and read the epistle, concerning which the important something "was to be done."

The twins immediately began to frown, Esther muttering that "Tinie always put herself foremost in everything," and Ruth darting inquisitive glances at the mysterious missive — a pretty note, edged with pink, and sealed with a blue wafer, whereon was embossed an elegant view of the Tower of London.

Ninian looked round on his little flock with his own half-suppressed, half-humorous smile. "Come, children, no contention, please! Tinie, read it aloud."

Tinie read:

"Belle-vue House, Wandsworth.

"SIR, — (ah! that is scratched out, and "Dear Sir," put in instead.) "Mrs. Watson Jones desires me to acknowledge the receipt of your last, and to state that the Christmas holidays are just commencing, when her charge

of myself terminates. She wishes to know what instructions you have received from my father concerning me, or where I am to spend the intervening time until his pleasure be known.

"I am, Sir, very respectfully yours,

HOPE ANSTED."

"A very pretty, proper, school-girl epistle," said Tinie, laughing. "Oh, brother! I knew you would have a nice bargain with those wards of yours. What will you do?"

"I am sure I don't know," answered Ninian; and he fairly looked uncomfortable. "She ought to be invited here."

"But only fancy an English young lady in our quiet home," observed Esther.

"Especially at The Gowans," added Ruth.

The twins were thorough Scottish girls, very reserved, and shy of strangers.

"I'm sure three sisters are trouble enough in a house without another girl besides," gruffly said Reuben — a decided misogynist at present.

"I have it — I have it!" said Tinie, clapping her hands. "She would exactly do for that angelic creature whom Edmund is so anxious to find and fall in love with, or, as he describes her himself in a scrap I found in his room,

'A something half-divine, half-human,
A dream of bliss, sublimed to woman!'"

Here poor Edmund, turning crimson to his very brow, made a precipitate retreat. All laughed; but the eldest brother looked grave, and desired "that there might be

no more of this folly." And Lindsay, always tender over the boy whom she had nursed through many a long sickness, and comforted in many a wayward mood, soon stole out of the room. They all knew it was to seek Edmund. But the young visionary did not appear again: they heard him up-stairs in the drawing-room playing on his beloved piano — Lindsay's gift; probably with Lindsay sitting by him, as she constantly did, though little she understood his music, except through the love of him.

The question concerning Hope Ansted's visit — "to be, or not to be?" — was again revived and discussed in full family conclave, and finally reduced to arbitration between the two elder and ruling powers. Ninian, who in his grave manhood, had a certain comical dislike to all young girls, and, in fact, had never much cared for any female society except that of his sisters, made various objections to the plan. But Lindsay happened to discover a postscript to the note, apparently hastily added in a most illegible girlish scrawl:

"P. S. — Mrs. Jones doesn't see this. I've just heard that my brothers are going to spend Christmas in Edinburgh, and I have not seen Willie and Bob for such a time! Oh! Mr. Græme, if you could but manage to get me there! "H. A."

"Poor little creature!" said Ninian compassionately, evidently quite conquered by this pathetic appeal.

"Suppose I write for her to come as soon as we are settled at The Gowans?" suggested the kind Lindsay.

Mr. Græme assented; rather hastily, for he was just starting to his daily duties as a writer to the signet.

Though the son of a professor, Ninian Græme was

himself nothing remarkable; he had never written a book or delivered a lecture in his life. Yet it was surprising what a number of the wise and learned folk of Edinburgh courted his acquaintance, and relished his plain good sense and the stores of his well-informed mind. Passing strangers, too, who came to lionise or be lionised among the celebrities of Modern Athens, often took mightily to Ninian Græme. At the present time, there was a young Englishman who positively seemed to haunt him, and to bestow on him that warmth of temporary friendship, often worth little, but always pleasant for the moment. This young man met Ninian at his office-door.

"Ha, my good fellow, I was just coming after you. I am longing to go to Roslin this fine autumn morning. What say you — shall we take a holiday?

"Your life seems to be one long holiday, Mr. Ulverston."

"Not at all. When I'm at home I see after my property, and study and write." He had, indeed, the look of a man of some brains; but it was a fashionably intellectual look, indicating one who made literature the mere colouring and adornment of life, not its whole aim and end. He was evidently not that individual, most miserable, yet most happy — a poor author. "Come, Græme, you'll go, won't you? You can put off business for a day?" he said, in a tone of persuasive confidence, which marked the man accustomed never to deny himself, and agreeably confident that his pleasure must necessarily be that of everybody else.

"Indeed, I regret it, but I cannot. I have" — here Ninian took up a heap of letters on his table — "I have

an hour's work here, which must be attended to. Then I must run down to Musselburgh."

"To Musselburgh!" Mr. Ulverston started, and bent down, tapping his boot with his cane. "Oh! that is some place near Edinburgh, isn't it? Do you know any one there, or are you going on office-business?"

"Partly on both. I have some law affairs to settle, and must meet a friend who lives there, Mrs. Forsyth."

"Any relation to the Mr. Forsyth to whom you introduced me the other night at Professor Reay's? A young minister, I remember."

"He is Mrs. Forsyth's only son. John Forsyth is one of the best among our rising preachers, and his mother, a widow, has need to be proud of him."

"No doubt. Have you known the family long?" asked Ulverston, who seemed to think he had a right to put any question to anybody, and often did so in a manner that would have been positively rude in any other man. But he had about him such a winning way, that no one was ever offended, and every one charmed with Mr. Ulverston.

"John and I were schoolfellows, and I have long been his mother's adviser, both in legal and friendly matters. She sends for me to consult me now on a somewhat strange circumstance."

"Ah, do let us hear it." And Ulverston, turning his back to Ninian, set one foot on the fender, and poked the fire with the toe of the other boot.

"Excuse me," said Mr. Græme; "it is a private and rather painful matter, which cannot interest a stranger." The words were courteous, but the young Englishman saw at a glance that, with all his gentleness, you might

as well try to pump water out of a rock as to coax a secret out of Ninian Græme. So he took up his hat to depart.

"I am sorry I cannot accompany you, Mr. Ulverston. Unless you like to wait here a little, and go with me to Musselburgh — it is rather an interesting town to strangers, and I know all its queer old nooks."

"No, no; I'd rather not. — Well — yes — I think I will," said the young man on a second thought; and, as he always seemed to follow the last and newest impulse, after some little hesitation he came back, and settled himself at the office fire.

He was a very handsome man — the perfect type of that Norman beauty still seen, though rarely, among the ancient gentry of England. There was something grand and mediæval in the turn of his head, with its curling brown hair; you might have fancied a baron's casque set there. The long, fair moustache — a pitiable resource in improving most modern faces — looked natural and suitable on his, and hid what might have otherwise marred its correct beauty — the large, somewhat too prominent lips, which, however suited to the sensual Norman baron, showed ill on the refined gentleman of the nineteenth century. Altogether, Mr. Ulverston's face was a strange compound of power and feebleness, of the intellectual and the animal. He sat there, twisting his figure — perhaps more stylish than graceful — into all sorts of restless attitudes, looking at his watch; poking the fire, reading by snatches at the newspaper, then tearing it up and making it into paper-boats, out of very waywardness and want of occupation, till the hour had slipped by.

Ninian kept punctually to his time — he always

did; and they both started for Musselburgh. The young Scotsman took an infinite deal of trouble to explain all concerning the town, from Prince Charlie's bridge down to the traditional rhyme,

> "Musselburgh was a borough when Edinburgh was nane,
> Musselburgh shall be a borough when Edinburgh's gane."

— Which seemed the only thing that interested or amused the fitful disposition of Mr. Ulverston, for he kept humming it to himself in an idle way. His conversation was usually rich and sparkling, full of romance, power, and feeling; so that in their walks even the quiet Ninian was often carried away by it, and wondered what could be the reason he did not altogether like such a pleasant companion. But to-day it was maintained by snatches, and at last altogether ceased.

"I must leave you soon," said Ninian, as they walked along; he taking the wet grassy edge of the footpath, while Mr. Ulverston's marked footsteps — he had rather a peculiar gait — sounded heavily on the gravel walk. "Here is Mrs. Forsyth's garden."

"Is it?" He said no more till they reached the gate.

"Can you wait for me? I will not be long, if possible," observed Ninian.

"Oh, no! I am going back to Edinburgh. And, by-the-by, I think I shall be off to London in a few days. However, I'll see you once more. Good-by, my dear fellow."

He strode away — his steps once more crunching the gravel, and resounding all along the wall.

Mr. Græme entered the garden, after waiting some time, for the gate was kept carefully locked. Passing

along, he saw in the walk underneath the garden wall the figure of a lady.

"Who is that?" he asked of the servant.

"It's just the young leddy that's comed here — Mrs. Armstrong, Dinna gang till her — ye'd better not. She's daft, ye ken!"

"Poor soul!" But though from a sense of delicacy Ninian did not approach, he could not help casting a glance at the "daft leddy." She did not notice him; she was listening, with all her ears and all her soul, to some distant sound. Her figure was stooping, her hands crushed together, and her head, turned aside, was bent forward in an agony of intentness. It was a touching picture of melancholy madness, perhaps haunted with visions imperceptible to the sense of all other human beings.

Mrs. Forsyth, a kindly-looking widow, greeted Ninian warmly. She talked a good deal about "John." He was evidently "John the Beloved" — truly named after him of all the disciples the most "divine," who ever seems to cast the shadow of his sanctity over that simple, commonsounding Christian name. Then Mrs. Forsyth asked Ninian about his own family — but formally, she being not very intimate with them. And at last, coming to the point, she began upon the business concerning which she had sent for Mr. Græme — the matter of her insane guest.

"I saw her in the garden. It seems a very quiet madness, as you told me. But what made you take such a charge upon yourself, Mrs. Forsyth?"

"Oh, poor young thing! she was a distant cousin of my own. Do you mind of her coming here for a day or

two, many years ago — a wild sort of a lassie — Rachel Armstrong?"

"Armstrong — that was her maiden and married name too, then? I heard your servant speak of her as *Mrs.* Armstrong."

"Her *married* name! — Well, God knows all; but I think no human being ever will. We call her Mrs. Armstrong just to humour her. That's her delusion. She thinks she is married, and that her husband is abroad, though not one of her friends ever heard of any living soul courting or marrying Rachel Armstrong. She was too proud for her station. She frightened all the young farmers away."

"I wish you would tell me the whole story," said Ninian, sitting down and putting on what Tinie called "his W. S. face" — that is, his attentive, penetrating, business look.

"The story is just this. Rachel was the daughter of a small Border farmer — a douce, common sort of man. I suppose she was brought up much like the rest of farmers' daughters in those parts — carelessly enough — for at thirteen I know she could scarcely read or write. Her father died then, and she was taken to live with some other of the Armstrongs. These people tell me she went on much as usual till she was seventeen, when she got a new whim; grew softened in her manners; tried to educate herself; and in a few years improved so, that my John, when he was in the Border country last, hardly knew his cousin Rachel. Since then, she took a brain fever — with overmuch study the Armstrongs think — and she came out of it the poor daft lassie you see. The doctor says she may outgrow it, though most likely she'll

remain queer all her life. And she's only two-and-twenty!"

"And so, as you told me, her friends consigned her to you, and you are to have the interest of her little fortune for her maintenance?"

"It's just that, Mr. Græme. And surely I will be kind to her, for she's a harmless, melancholy creature!"

"I would like to see her," said Ninian, thoughtfully.

"It will be of little use, for ever since she entered my doors, a month ago, she has not uttered a single word. She sits for hours looking at the sky, or twisting about a ring, that for some whim she has got on her wedding-finger."

"It may be really her wedding-ring."

"Impossible! for it was the guard of her mother's. Rachel must have had it for years. No, no," said Mrs. Forsyth, with the air of a woman who had thoroughly fixed her opinion, and will not be swerved therefrom, "it is utterly out of the question that Rachel Armstrong can have been really married — or — anything, perhaps worse. It's just her romance that has turned her brain; for a time only perhaps, and then she'll come into her right mind."

"Let us hope so," answered Ninian. But further conversation was interrupted by the sudden appearance of the poor maniac. The harmless melancholy of which Mrs. Forsyth had spoken seemed to have all vanished; she entered the room with an excited look, as if seeking some one. She rushed up to Ninian, catching his arm, but when she saw his countenance her own changed to

a look of blank disappointment. She uttered a sort of restless moan, and turned away.

This is my friend Mr. Ninian Græme. You will speak to him, will you not, Rachel?"

She shook her head, and went and sat down by the window, swaying to and fro in a sort of passive despair. A mournful wreck she was, but only as regarded the mind. Her youth and comeliness were still retained. Ninian thought he had scarcely ever seen such a striking-looking woman. The shape of her head was magnificent. Her hair, of a deep dark red, somewhat coarse in texture, as that colour generally is, was rolled in heavy waves over her brow. And what a brow! Smooth, broad, queenly, overshadowing the eyes, conveying the idea of remarkable mental power. Beneath were eyes such as always accompany this rare and beautiful shade of hair — eyes of a warm, clear brown; not gleaming, but steady in light; lifted up with a sort of wonder-look, as if they saw what no other eyes could see; usually calm, but with such depths of passion in them, that you felt instinctively the soul which they reflected could be, as fate led, either that of a Clytie or a Clytemnestra. For the rest of the features, the nose was good; the mouth had little beauty. Yet all were spiritualised by the clear, perfectly colourless complexion — pallid, but fair, and by those wonderful — wonderful eyes!

And yet she was mad! For a moment Ninian could hardly bring himself to believe the fact. There was such a passionate intensity in her look, such a grace and womanly refinement about her dress and mien, quite different from the carelessness usually manifested by those hapless ones from whom Heaven has taken the light of reason. But very soon he saw that if not posi-

tively insane, there was in her mind some strange
— some heavy numbing of the faculties. Her eye
dull, her face blank and immovable, like a lands
from which the sun has faded away, leaving it all
and dark.

"It is no use speaking to her; she will remai
this way for hours, sometimes. I cannot tell what ro
her when you came in. She never before appeare
excited," whispered Mrs. Forsyth.

"I wonder," said Ninian, pondering a little,
trying to put together, in his clear-headed fashion,
the evidence he could muster, to test a belief that w
linger in his mind — "I wonder if she mistook m
any one else, whom she is vaguely expecting?" An
remembered how he had first seen her, eagerly liste
Could it be, that the distant voice of himself or his
panion had touched some strange chord in her wand
mind? But no — both Mr. Ulverston and himself
quite silent, except for those few words spoken at
gate. And the mere footsteps of strangers outside
wall could never have affected her thus.

"However," thought he, with lawyer-like preci
"I will leave no ground untried." So he began to s
aloud to Mrs. Forsyth concerning his morning's
ceedings, mentioning several times distinctly, in
poor girl's hearing, the name of Ulverston. But th
she paused a moment in her rocking at the soun
Ninian's voice, and listened as if the tone were plea
to her — it was indeed the kindest, most che
voice imaginable — still she gave no sign of intere
recognition. The blankness of her face never char
but seemed rather to deepen. Ninian's wild, improb
conjecture — awakened by the many strange inci

of life which, during his professional career, he had seen — died away, as being utterly untenable. But an interest stronger than any which even his kind heart had ever known, was kindled there for poor Rachel Armstrong.

Before leaving, he determined to go and speak to her — if, perhaps, a stranger's notice might break her obstinate silence. "How must I call her, *Miss*, or *Mrs.*?" asked he of Mrs. Forsyth.

"*Mrs.*, by all means. The contrary only irritates her; and, considering the nature of her delusion, it sounds better to the servant. So we always speak of her as 'Mrs. Armstrong' — the only surname we can give her, since we know of no other."

Mr. Græme went up to the poor girl. "I am going now. You will shake hands with me, will you not? and another time we may be better friends."

Rachel lifted up her eyes with a sharp, childish expression of surprise; and scanned Ninian's face curiously. Apparently something there pleased or touched her, for she did not refuse to take his hand, though still her lips were as dumb as if no sound had stirred them since her birth.

He pursued his conversation, trying to make it both in words and manner such as he would address to any lady of mind and good breeding. Possibly this contrasted bitterly with the way in which the poor bewildered one was usually treated; or, perhaps, something in Ninian, or some fancy connected with him and his coming, caused to vibrate those hidden chords in her spirit, now

"Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh."

She let him talk on, looking at him the while, as if his very smile were soothing. She seemed at times as though about to speak, but never did speak, though more than once her lips moved and her eyes sought Ninian's with a look of piteous inquiry.

"Is there anything I can do for you — any books you would like to read?" he persisted kindly. She shook her head with a hopeless indifference. "At least you will allow me to see you, when I call again, will you not, Mrs. Armstrong?"

As Ninian spoke, her dull eyes kindled with reproach and anger. She set her teeth together, as if it needed more than even the obstinacy of insanity to maintain her self-imposed silence. But her uncontrollable passion would burst forth. She looked round a moment to see if any one were within hearing, and, lifting herself up with great haughtiness, said,

"You mistake. Not Mrs. Armstrong — *Mrs. Sabine.*"

And then — the name she had forced herself to utter seeming to pierce her poor troubled brain like a trumpet-blast — she cried out with one long bitter cry, and fell into convulsions.

CHAPTER III.

Everybody knows the horrors of a "flitting;" at least, everybody who belongs to that worthy, independent rank, our own good middle class — the ever-thrilling heart of the community, which continually sends its lifetide in vigour to the brain and in strength to the limbs; out of which our thinkers rise to guide, and our workers rise to rule. And to this sphere of the toilers and spinners belonged the Græme family. Every one of them laboured hard, with head and hands too, during the flitting, and the preparations towards the new house. For Ninian said that work was good; and thought — though he did not say — that it would keep them all from sad, or fretful fancies concerning the change which must inevitably be felt in their way of life.

So now, for the first time, Edmund learned to pack up books as well as read them; and Reuben's mechanical skill was degraded from the making of electrical machines to the putting up of shelves. Lindsay and the twins devoted their whole energies to domestic arrangements; while Charlie's superabundant vivacity was made useful by his being kept in a perpetual state of locomotion for his sisters' benefit. As for pressing Tinie into the service, you might as well have tried to chain a sunbeam; but her light spirit interpenetrating the family mass, seemed to give vitality to the whole.

The few weeks passed; weeks that might have been sad, for in all change is some sadness, but were kept

cheerful through continual occupation. And thus they made ready to leave the house where the old professor had dwelt for fifteen long years.

"You'll not come home any more to this disorderly place, which I know keeps you in a continual fidget, though you never complain, brother," said Tinie, running down stairs after Ninian, when, having helped in all the arrangements on the day of the flitting, he was leaving at last for his office. "Certainly Miss Hope Ansted would have been shocked out of her proprieties and gentilities, if she had come last week as she proposed. If she would but stay out of the way till we get settled a little at The Gowans —"

"A week will do that. I wrote and fixed Saturday for her coming," said Ninian, rather lugubriously, as if resigning himself to a painful necessity.

"Ah, now! suppose your ward turns out a nice little creature after all, and you make a pet of her, and like her better than Tinie? If you do, I'll tell you what *I* will do. I'll go and marry stupid Bailie Duncan, or solemn John Forsyth, or even that handsome, polite Englishman who called the other day when you were out — Mr. — Mr. Ulverston."

"Heaven forbid!" muttered Ninian. He hardly knew why, but it seemed intensely repugnant, the idea of one of his sisters marrying Mr. Ulverston. However, he smiled at his own folly and at Tinie's too. "You goose of a lassie! as if your brother would let you leave him to marry anybody!" And he pulled the long curls that drooped over the balustrade. "Now good-by till tea-time at The Gowans."

Just as he opened the door, Lindsay entered. She had been busy all day, in-doors and out and looked

wearied and pale. Ninian turned back with her into the little parlour, the only room in the house which was not yet dismantled. He went to get her some wine, and, returning, found her sitting in the old arm-chair, her face pressed against its cushions. Then he remembered how, years ago, he himself being quite a boy and the rest mere babes, when the children were all put to bed, his eldest sister and a guest they often had, used to go and sit in this little room, talking for hours. He knew she was thinking of it now, and that she felt as none of them could feel, the pang of quitting a house which she was once to have left a bride, had not Heaven's will intervening made her for life a widow though unwed.

But these things were never spoken of now; so he only gave her the wine, talked cheerfully for a few minutes, and, departing, sent a private summons to Esther and Ruth, that "Our Sister" was to be watched over with especial care, lest she should over-fatigue herself.

Ninian was no sentimentalist; and the calm tenor of his life had never known a past — at least not such a past as Lindsay's. Perhaps he had had his dreams, as all young men have, but they were mere outward fancies — shadows floating round the untouched depths of his true heart. Thither the one Angel of life had never descended to trouble the waters and depart, but even in departing to leave behind a healing power.

Ninian Græme evidently meddled with none of these things. He looked like what he was — a contented, quiet-hearted man, plodding from home to office, and from office back to home, yet touched occasionally with keen sympathies from without, as he had been in the case of Rachel Armstrong. Her story, poor soul! or such as there was of the same, had strongly interested

him. Whenever he thought of it, his cheerful face became grave. And somehow he had lately got into the habit of thinking of it, on his walks to and from his office. Even on this day it haunted him, for he walked on in meditation so deep that he started like an accused criminal on hearing himself called.

"Just in time to bid you good-by. Jump in, Græme, and see me to the railway," cried Mr. Ulverston, out of a trunk-laden cab.

"You are leaving us, then?" And Ninian did not look by any means so surprised or regretful as politeness demanded. However, he good-naturedly joined his friend, or acquaintance he himself would perhaps have said, for Mr. Græme was particular in the minor truths of current phraseology.

They drove on to that nucleus where so many diverse phases of human life converge, and may be at leisure studied or moralised over — a railway terminus. They had to wait there some time, while the down-train from London disembogued itself of its various contents, ere Ulverston could start by the up-train, as he appeared in a great hurry to do. Meanwhile the two young men lounged up and down, conversing together and criticising the passers-by.

"I thought you had already left. I have scarce seen anything of you since we were at Musselburgh," said Ninian.

"I've been out of town," quickly answered the other. "Edinburgh is horribly cold and dreary now. By-the-by, speaking of your friends at Musselburgh, have you seen anything of Mr. Forsyth lately?"

"No," said Ninian, briefly; adding afterwards, "Did

you like him so much, then? — would you have wished to meet him again? I could easily have managed it."

"Thank you, but you see I'm off now. Some other time. — By Jove! what a pretty face there is under that Quakerish bonnet," cried he, starting off, in his impulsive way, on a new tack, and forgetting everything else in his eagerness to stare at a plainly-dressed girl, who stood pensive and desolate amidst her luggage. Ninian was not the sort of young man to run wild after "pretty faces," so he just glanced that way, pitying the blank, frightened, helpless look that dulled the beauty of features which really merited Mr. Ulverston's notice. Perhaps, in his universal kindliness, Mr. Græme might have come forward to offer help to the young creature, who seemed perfectly bewildered with the confusion around her; but he saw that his companion had apparently the same intent, and drew back. However, the girl's good angel intervened in the shape of a railway porter, and she, with her possessions, was swept away towards a cab.

"Confound it!" cried Ulverston, laughing, but looking vexed. "However, I saw her name on her box; it is —"

Here the warning bell stopped all his revelations; and, bidding Ninian a hasty adieu, heaping upon him likewise those meaningless invitations — the mere I. O. U.'s of the moment, which nobody ever thinks of presenting for payment — Mr. Ulverston was whirled away southward.

His late companion could hardly be said to regret the parting; yet every good-by, even to an indifferent person, leaves a vague dulness behind — a sort of "Well, I wonder if we shall ever meet again, or how?"

Feeling this, Ninian watched the last speck of the train disappear. Then, finding it was too late to do any good in office-work that day, he lounged about a few minutes longer, and took the next train to Musselburgh.

All things were there as he had left them on his last weekly visit. For he had been with Mrs. Forsyth every week during the illness into which Rachel Armstrong had sunk. Rachel Armstrong she was still called: Ninian thought he had no right to reveal to any one the name which he, and he only, had heard her utter. But many a time he wearied himself in vain conjectures, and nothing could make him believe that she was really so mad as Mrs. Forsyth thought. Eagerly now, as at every visit, he asked, "If there was any change?"

"None. She just holds her tongue, except for a few words now and then to me. Always kindly, too, poor lassie! She's never sulky as she used to be. Still, I can't get anything out of her, though Bell says that half the night through she's at her havers, muttering to herself."

"Does she look composed?"

"You may see, for we brought her down to the little drawing-room close by. Hark! she's speaking to Bell now."

It was in a quiet tone, perfectly self-possessed — the voice one of those low rich voices, laden with the burden of a full heart, which we always recognise, and feel its influence we know not why.

Bell came in most *à propos* to explain that the poor lady had been saying she wished to see Mr. Græme, whom she had watched from the window. She always sat watching at the window, morn, noon, and eve. It was the sole fancy remaining of all her "strange ways,"

Mrs. Forsyth said; in everything else, save her continual apathetic silence and melancholy, Rachel conducted herself like a reasonable woman.

"I am glad she wants to see you, for I had talked a great deal to her about you. Though, generally, she doesn't care to see anybody, not even John," said the mother, to whom the last circumstance was the climax of all peculiarity.

Ninian went in to see the poor maniac who had interested him so much. But nothing of madness was there about her now. Worn by her long illness — her usual pallid complexion grown almost death-like, her eyes larger and more "wonderful" than ever — still greater than the outward change was the inward change of the mind. He saw in a moment that there was reason in that face — faint, perhaps, and still obscured at intervals, but it was there. And the difference it wrought, showed Ninian yet more clearly that she had indeed been really mad. Then, all the fantasies of her brain must have been delusions too. Recollecting this, he resolved not to address her by the name of Sabine, or indeed by any name at all.

"I am glad to see you much better." He could not say any more than this, so touched was he by the expression of the pale passive face, which tried to smile, and failed, as if smiles belonged to a past life, and not to that sphere of being in which this forlorn one had darkly dwelt so long. The sound of Ninian's voice seemed to call up some phantoms, yet unlaid, from the dreamy caverns of her brain; for she drew her hands across her eyes, saying,

"Yes; I have been very ill; and things are still confused a little, here."

"Would you like me to come another day, when you are stronger?"

"No, no! I wanted you. Ay, I remember. Will you be seated, Mr. Græme." And now, the shadow being past, her eyes shone with a cold clear light, and her manner took a composed dignity which perfectly astonished Ninian. There was something even queen-like in her attitude and mien, as, gathering her white draperies round her, she leaned back in her arm-chair. It reminded him of Queen Katherine — for Ninian, though no genius, was a man of reading, and loved Shakspeare. Now, in the want of general conversation, he ventured to make the remark.

She started — one of her quick wild looks came and faded. "Ah, indeed! So you read Shakspeare — as I did, once. Well, perhaps, we do look like that scene, in 'King Henry VIII.' is it not? You are Griffiths, and here is my kind Patience" — she turned affectionately to Mrs. Forsyth — "I, the poor Queen Katherine." And in a voice of deep pathos she repeated — half to herself as it were — the speech beginning

> "Would I had never trod this English earth,
> Nor felt the flatteries that do grow upon it!
> Ye have angels' faces, but Heaven knows your hearts —"

Here she stopped abruptly — "No — not that — I never meant that. How dares any one say I am like Queen Katherine?"

"My dear — my poor Rachel!" interposed Mrs. Forsyth, alarmed at the almost threatening gleam of the girl's eyes. "Come; don't go back to this play-acting and foolishness, which they told me about — I'm sure it was that which was too much for your poor brain."

"Hush — hush," said Ninian, warningly; for he saw

that though Rachel spoke no more, the dark shadows of madness, so lately banished, came flitting over her countenance. He changed the conversation; and prevented Mrs. Forsyth's kind but ill-judged officiousness from chafing this poor troubled spirit, until at last the good woman quitted the room.

Then Rachel, who had been leaning back in her usual apathetic way, suddenly grasped his arm, whispering in a tone agitated indeed, but perfectly sane:

"You are kind: I understand you. I am not mad, as they think; but I have been so. Yes; I know I have been mad. It was no wonder."

"Why?"

"I can't tell you; I will not — must not. It is a secret. But I shall hear some day — I know I shall. I fully thought I should — that day I listened to you in the garden. — What made you come there? And — and —" Her whole face quivered with eagerness — "Who was with you?"

"An acquaintance of mine, Mr. Ulverston."

"Ah!" She sunk back with a long, long sigh.

"Did you know Mr. Ulverston?"

"Oh, no, no! Don't talk about him," she added, restlessly; "it does not interest me. I never heard the name." And she closed her eyes, sighing once again, so bitterly!

Mrs. Forsyth's heavy footstep was heard on the stairs. Rachel roused herself, clasped Ninian's arm till her long slender fingers felt like rings of iron, and whispered.

"Before she comes back, listen. You remember I once told you a name? That was a great sin, because I had promised not. I never shall utter it more, until —" Here her countenance looked heavenly with its momen-

tary rapture. "Therefore, Mr. Græme, if you have any recollection of that name —"

"It is, and always will be, as though I had never heard it," said Ninian, firmly. "Be satisfied; all is safe."

She cast upon him a look of wild gratitude; nay, she even snatched and kissed his hand. Mr. Græme felt quite uncomfortable: he did not understand the romantic impulses of such a creature as Rachel Armstrong. But in walking homeward — for he had left as soon as Mrs. Forsyth returned to the room — he pondered over the matter, and his common sense told him it was nothing but what might have been expected from such a youth as hers had been. Entirely shut out from the world, her mind had evidently formed itself from the struggling life within, aided by some single influence from without. But whether her mysteries were, as Mrs. Forsyth implied, only "play-acting, or whether they were indeed reality, Ninian could not satisfy himself. He felt a relief when he passed from the excitement which seemed an atmophere ever surrounding poor Rachel Armstrong, into the serener airs which breathed around his own fireside.

It was a clear starry wintry night, as he walked up the little avenue which led to The Gowans; for the house boasted an avenue, a lawn, and a garden, though all had long lain in a state of desolation. One would hardly believe there was such a solitary old-fashioned place so near the centre of a city like Edinburgh. Ninian, who had a fancy for all quaint, quiet nooks, scanned his new home, and gloried in it.

All was so still and deserted, it might have been Hood's immortal "Haunted House," but for dim rays of

light that came through cracked window-shutters, showing for certain that the ghosts were holding revelry. Ninian walked in, smiling to think that his family had already become so ruralised as to keep unlatched doors; and there, with the light snow lying in white sparkles on his hat, coat, and hair, he stood before them — an apparition of delight.

For, jumping round him like very children, came Tinie, Edmund, and Charlie. "Oh, brother, we have been waiting for you a whole hour, because — because —"

Here Ninian's quick eye glancing over the circle, discovered one addition — a girl, very small, and childish-looking, who rose from her seat in the corner, and curtsied with an air decidedly prim. Mr. Græme bowed; and there they stood until Tinie's merry laugh broke the awkward pause.

"Oh, what fun! Here's a surprise! It was so to us at first; but she has been three hours in the house, and we've found out we need not have been afraid of her in the least. Guess, brother — guess who she is."

"Tinie," said Esther, as the stranger began to colour, and Ninian to look rather uncomfortable; "Tinie, I'm ashamed of you. Why can't you say at once that it is Miss Ansted?"

"— Who mistook the date you fixed, and has come a week too soon; but not too soon for our cordial welcome," added Lindsay, kindly.

Hope Ansted curtsied once more — to Miss Græme this time — and then, touching Ninian's offered hand with the tips of her fingers, subsided into her old corner, guarded on either side by the twins, who, shy themselves,

seemed unaccountably to sympathise with this — the shyest young lady that ever was known.

Ninian, perfectly confounded at the appearance of his ward in a character the very opposite of what they all expected, took the earliest opportunity of stealing apart with Tinie.

"Did you ever see such a girl!" broke out the voluble "pet of the family." "And an English girl, too, who has lived all her life in London. I'm sure she looks as if she had never been outside the walls of her boarding-school. Every sentence she speaks — and she has not spoken a dozen — she brings in something about 'Mrs. Watson Jones.' And at the mere name she looks round as if Mrs. Watson Jones stood behind her. Poor thing! I'm sure she has been frightened out of her seven senses, and all the spirit crushed out of her. Her very face shows that."

"Probably so," said Ninian. He was thinking that somewhere or other he had seen the face before.

"It's a pretty face, too," Tinie went on; "only there's no life in it. And she's not a bad figure, but for that odious brown merino dress, and white linen collar. I hate linen collars; don't you, brother?"

"How should I judge?" answered Ninian, smiling. He had all at once recollected where he had seen that fair, still face, with the down-cast eyes. It was the same which Mr. Ulverston had so rudely stared at when they were at the railway terminus. He determined not to allude to the fact, as probably such a very, very quiet girl had never noticed either him or his companion; of whose companionship on this occasion Mr. Græme did not feel altogether proud.

"She seems quite a child, too; is scarcely seventeen — for we asked her. And yet she has such a prim, old-fashioned air about her. She'll 'turn' us all into icicles. I don't know how we will manage to get on together!" continued Tinie, in such a comical despair that her brother was quite amused.

"Well, my wee thing" — *wee thing* was one of Tinie's pet names — "we must all do the best we can with her, making allowances for her manners and education."

"Education! Why, she can't speak the Queen's English correctly! She drops her *h*'s sometimes."

"Then we'll teach her better. And we must remember what a dreary life she has led; her father abroad — with no mother, or sisters, or elder brothers."

"No elder brother — ah, Ninian!" murmured Tinie, lovingly pressing close to him; then adding, in her wilful way, "Hurrah for Mr. Græme of The Gowans, guardian, schoolmaster, and general philanthropist!"

"Hush!" said Ninian, laughing. But his little fairy of a sister had put him into such a good humour, that when he re-entered the parlour he looked quite radiant and handsome. At least so Tinie declared, and was wicked enough to ask the shy guest if she did not think so? Whereupon Hope Ansted lifted her great eyes, dropped them again, pursed her lips, and said nothing. She was evidently terribly afraid of Mr. Græme.

The whole family tried to amuse and encourage her — all except Reuben, from whose stern, woman-hating cynicism, no civility was ever expected. Edmund ventured a few remarks of a poetical nature, but found that she had, as he expressed it, "no soul;" so contented himself with a cold admiration of her beautiful nose and

mouth. Tinie attacked her with fun and harmless jokes, but she never laughed, and looked quite shocked sometimes. She only seemed to feel at ease with the twins and their Berlin work, which, she said, "she was very fond of at school." So she buried herself among wools and patterns; under which salutary influence her hands unbent from their frigid fold on her lap, and once or twice she was heard to speak in a very precise and timid way. But this was only when the rest were talking so loud that nobody listened, save Ninian; and when she unfortunately caught his eye, she once more grew formal and frightened. In fact, the whole family soon set down Hope Ansted as a common-place schoolgirl; which was, indeed, the sole character she could lay claim to — except on account of her beauty, then only dawning, and probably visible but to few eyes.

The evening passed somewhat heavily; after a time, the young Græmes fairly grew tired of amusing their guest, and left her alone. Ninian tried to address some few remarks to her, but her mind was apparently so unformed, or so dull, that even he gave her up in despair; until at last, bidding her good-night, he did so with a cheerful air.

"You must try to consider yourself quite like one of the children here; but I dare say you feel strange at first."

"Yes — and no doubt you are quite alarmed at our brother," added Tinie, hurrying Miss Ansted through the hall; "isn't he a grave, formal creature — the darling! Everybody thinks him solemn as a judge the first time of seeing him. Did you?"

"I had seen him before," said Hope, a faint smile creeping in at the corners of her mouth.

"Where — where?" And all the girls clustered round her.

"At the railway this afternoon. He had with him a gentleman."

"What sort of a gentleman?"

"Very handsome; the handsomest I ever saw, with such a beautiful fair moustache!"

"Well," cried Tinie, bounding back to the parlour in a hearty fit of laughter; "our demure little maiden has found her tongue, and her eyes too; she has just been telling us how she met you, brother Ninian, and with you a gentleman, 'the handsomest she ever saw.'"

"Mr. Ulverston again!" thought Ninian. But he only said, "Indeed!" patted Tinie's shoulder, and told her to run away to bed.

CHAPTER IV.

"You'll come with us to hear Mr. Forsyth preach to-night before he leaves for his manse in the Highlands?" said Ninian to Miss Ansted.

"Yes," answered Hope, who in the course of a few weeks had learned to do everything that Mr. Græme desired her. In fact, she was one of those malleable characters who are subject to any one's bidding. A thread guided her, as if it were a thread of love. In the genial atmosphere of the Gowans, the poor frozen plant had woke up to a faint life — as Edmund expressed it in a sonnet he wrote — which seemed as if he were trembling on the verge of falling in love with her. But he changed his mind, and didn't.

They all went to hear Mr. Forsyth. It was at a small town some miles distant from Edinburgh — the town where the young minister was born. He had never yet preached there, as Ninian explained to Miss Ansted on their way thither. For Mr. Græme always tried to talk to his ward, and draw out what little mind he supposed she had; and sometimes it gave him pleasure to see a faint ray of interest in her beautiful but childish face. He told the old story of John Forsyth: how he had risen from the lowest estate of a poor man's son, toiling step by step with indomitable perseverance, until he was able to study for the ministry. How when the spirit of his great calling entered into him, that which was at first ambition grew into the higher feeling of

devotion to the cause whereto he had been sanctified; so that now he was about to give up all his prospects as an eloquent and promising preacher, to become a poor labourer in his Master's far vineyard.

"Is not this great and good?" said Ninian at last, turning to his silent companion, whom he had almost forgotten in the enthusiasm of talking about his friend.

Hope Ansted said nothing, but there came a sweet thoughtfulness into her childish eyes, and she looked up at Mr. Græme as if she felt that he, at least, was "great and good." Tinie, who had her brother's other arm, did the same. And Ninian, glancing down upon their young faces, smiled as if they were two pet children growing up under his care.

They entered the church, a large grey building. It was crowded with people, who came from all the country round to hear the young minister who had once been a "bit laddie" among them. Many of them were whispering — even talking aloud — a custom not unfrequent in a Scottish kirk, though seeming to southern ears strangely inconsistent in such a devout and religious land. All their talk was about John Forsyth, and many an eye was turned to where his mother sat. By her side was a strange lady.

"Is that Rachel Armstrong?" whispered Miss Græme, who had learnt from Mrs. Forsyth the supposed history of the girl.

It was Rachel. She might be known by the carriage of her head: so stately, so different from every other woman there.

"She must be quite herself now," Ninian said. "You shall speak to her after the sermon. You might do her good, Lindsay, as you do to every one."

"Hush!" Our Sister answered, with her soft smile; for now there came a pause over the murmuring assembly, who immediately fell into the silence befitting a religious service.

John Forsyth stood, a minister, in the church where he had worshipped as a child. He was still a very young man, and seemed younger even than he was, from his fair complexion and hair. There was something pure and saint-like in his whole mien. You felt at once that he had been rightly named John, and that the Divine Apostle's spirit was dwelling in him. He prayed silently for a few moments; then stood up, and met the one fixed gaze of that thronged mass of people — his own people, too, his friends and his brethren. He had come to be a prophet in his own country. It was a moment that might well have dazzled the senses of the young minister, and brought in worldly thoughts and worldly pride between him and his vow. He looked very pale, and for the first few words his voice was inaudible. Afterwards it gained strength, and he read the opening hymn in a clear impressive tone.

The tune was "*Martyrdom.*" — A few weak notes from the precentor — and then it rose up from the vast congregation in a whirlwind of sound, filling the whole church, rolling wave after wave, in something higher, diviner than mere melody. The poor old precentor's voice was drowned in that ocean of song. Verse after verse it swelled and sank, all individual discords being lost in its great harmonious flood, until it seemed a fitting type of that infinite Company, which, gathered from all the ends of the earth, shall one day be heard "praising God with a loud voice."

The hymn ceased; there was a silence; and then, the

young minister began his prayer. Ninian saw how the mother, unable to stand, sat with her withered hands trembling; his own sisters were deeply touched; Lindsay more than all, for *he* who long since had prayed his last prayer on earth, had also been a minister. Rachel Armstrong alone remained unmoved, standing fixedly looking forward. Ninian turned towards Hope Ansted, who, startled and affected by this scene, to her so strange, had knelt down in her English fashion, her hands half covering her face. He thought what a gentle, girlish face it was, and how different from Rachel's stern beauty. These thoughts were, however, but the flashes of a moment, ere he tried to cast them all aside, and lift his heart where alone it ought to be lifted at such a time and place.

The service was long; but it was one that could never be forgotten in the town where John Forsyth was born. At its close, people forgot to argue, as Scotch congregations will always do, concerning the sermon; they only spoke of the man — the young preacher — who was going forth from among them all, to enter on the work of Heaven.

"And Heaven will prosper it, my dear John," said Ninian, earnestly, as he clasped his old companion's hand, when, the congregation having dispersed, the Græmes and Forsyths met. Mr. Forsyth stood, with his mother on his arm and his cousin beside him. His fair cheek was a little flushed, but his manner was composed and serene. It only changed when Ninian came and spoke to Mrs. Armstrong.

"You are quite well now, I hope? I am so glad to see you here. You, too, must feel rejoiced and proud this day."

"I?" she said, listlessly. "Oh! because of my cousin John. I have little interest in those things, but John asked me, so I came."

"You ought, indeed, Rachel, for you know how anxious John has been about you, always; I think you might be more pleased than you seem," interposed the mother rather fretfully.

"Hush, mother!" said Mr. Forsyth, as he walked aside, and spoke to Lindsay Græme.

The two families stood together for a good while, talking in the aisle of the church. It was a soft spring evening, and as the lights were put out within the building, the moonshine entered from without, giving to all their faces a spectral, shadowy look. Especially to that of Rachel, who walked restlessly up and down, scarcely speaking to any one except Edmund, by whose boyish countenance she had seemed attracted and pleased.

"Do you think she is quite right here now?" whispered the old lady to Mr. Græme, with a mysterious finger on her forehead. "John thinks she is; she never alludes to her fantastic notions, and my son will have it that she was never mad at all, only queer from the fever she had. John is so anxious about her."

"I see that," answered Ninian, rather sadly, as he noticed that his friend, though talking with Lindsay and the others, continually glanced towards Rachel, with that restless look which often so mournfully tells how to the gazer the whole world is becoming filled with one human presence. "Does Mrs. Armstrong go out at all?" he asked. "Would she come and see my sisters? We have, or try to have, a merry house at The Gowans, for the sake of this English girl who is living with us."

"Miss Ansted? Oh, yes, John was speaking of her: a shy, quiet, rather stupid little thing."

"Nay — not stupid."

"Well, but about this visit. Rachel, my dear, Mr. Græme is inviting you to the Gowans. It would do you good, and cheer up your spirits," said Mrs. Forsyth, in a soothing, patronising tone, that evidently galled poor Rachel beyond endurance.

She said, sharply, "I will not go;" and turned again to Edmund.

But some time after, when they were all quitting the church, she suddenly changed her mind, and said to Lindsay, who had been talking with her, "Miss Græme, I should like to go home with you. It is a week-day evening, though it seems like Sunday, so my cousin cannot object."

"Oh, no," cried the delighted Mrs. Forsyth, "and John shall come."

"By no means; this boy will be my true knight." And taking Edmund's arm — he seeming divided between the indignity of being called "this boy," and the pleasure of being noticed by a lady of such fair and graceful presence — Rachel Armstrong went forward, and distanced them all.

Ninian, with Hope Ansted, walked along beside John Forsyth and his mother. The old lady talked eagerly of her son's plans, and of the wild northern region whither he was going.

"And you are satisfied and glad to go?" his friend asked.

"Yes," said Forsyth, and his countenance resumed the serene St. John like aspect which it had lost in Rachel's presence. "I think above all things one ought

to set one's duty, and this seems mine. To be sure, it will be dreary at first, for my mother stays behind, and I hear the manse is a desolate place; but in time — in time, it may grow cheerful."

"When he has a wife and bairns," whispered Tinie to Hope Ansted: "Why don't you try for the vacant office? you'd make a capital minister's wife."

Hope looked timidly at her guardian, then cast her eyes down, and said, "she never thought of such things."

It was nine o'clock before they reached The Gowans: a mild, still night, so bright that they could see the little crocuses and snowdrops peeping up from under the leafless bushes. Edmund went and brought some to Mrs. Armstrong. She took them with an almost childish pleasure, looked at them until her eyes grew heavy with a trouble that would not rain itself out in tears.

"It is a long, long time since any one has brought me flowers," said she, in a broken voice; and then, during all tea-time, she sat still and scarcely spoke.

The evening amusements of the circle went on much as usual, for so Ninian and Lindsay had agreed would be best. None took much notice of their new visitor, except Edmund, who kept near her, and seemed to read her strange pale face with all his boyish soul. After supper, the girls, with Hope Ansted, sat and worked; while Charlie learnt his lessons, and Reuben, in despair of other entertainment, took out his electrical machine, and began to electrify the cat. Soon the circle gathered round him, and peals of laughter, even from the quiet Hope Ansted, testified to the pleasant family fun that continually lighted up The Gowans.

"I wish I were a child — I wish I were a child!" muttered Rachel Armstrong; while fitful shadows, some-

times of mirth, sometimes of bitterness, came and went over her features, as she sat and watched "the children."

"Wherefore?" said Ninian.

He in his turn had been watching her.

"Because — nay, I cannot tell, but I want to be a child. I want to laugh and be merry. I am so young, and yet life seems so long — so dull. Couldn't you tell me what I must do?" And with a sorrowful entreaty she looked up at Ninian.

There was in him a something to which every one instinctively came for help.

"How do you mean?"

"I scarcely know, only that my mind is so restless, and yours seems ever so quiet and good. Mrs. Forsyth chafes me, kind though she is; but you always make me feel calm and at rest. Couldn't you help me — couldn't you think of something to make the days pass quicker during this weary, weary waiting?"

"Waiting for what?"

She pressed her lips together angrily.

"I will not tell you. Nay, do not look at me so, as if your eyes would force out the truth. I cannot tell a falsehood, but I can keep silence." And her former excited manner came back, though she struggled hard to keep it down.

It was touching to see how the still perturbed mind, as if conscious of the insanity that had been, strove to control itself, and guide its wandering fancies into the light of reason.

"Another time, Mrs. Armstrong," said Ninian, gently — "another time we will have a long talk together, and I will tell you what I think would amuse and occupy you. Study, for instance. My sisters study every night,

though they are nearly as old as you are; but, I think, not so well educated."

"You consider me well educated then?" eagerly cried Rachel. "There is nothing in me very ignorant, or low, or repulsive, is there? — You are quite sure of that? Though I was — yes I was — a mean farmer's daughter."

"That excites my wonder," Ninian answered, in his frank way. "I was aware in what a lowly estate you were born. You need not be ashamed of that, you know, but rather proud in having conquered all hindrances, and become the woman that I feel you are; without compliment — a woman of cultivated mind, and as true a *lady* as any I know. However you contrived to attain all this is a mystery."

"Ah! is it — is it?"

Her eyes literally gleamed; whether with pride, or joy, or — ay, it was something greater than both; the only light which, shining from a human face, however plain, glorifies it into beauty.

"You must have had an intense thirst for knowledge," Ninian continued, "and an energy of will almost marvellous in a woman, considering the sort of people among whom you lived."

"They were brute beasts, and I was one of them!" cried Rachel. "Ah! you should have known me in those days! I was plain — I was coarse. If you had seen these hands, brown and rough with labour —" And she stretched out a hand and arm, large, but beautiful in form and colour. "Nay, worse than all, if you had looked into my heart and mind, both as black and dark as a winter's night, thrilled with distant storms. For I was stormy, too. When my passions rose I could do anything — anything! And I had no counsellor to rule

me, no intellect or education to guide me. Oh, what a creature I was!"

She said this, as if she took pleasure in hurling disdain upon her olden self; though in speaking that strangely proud, defiant, yet rapturous smile was never absent from her face.

"In truth," said Ninian, "you have cause to take pride in what you have accomplished."

"I take pride!" she repeated. "Yes, I am proud, and glad too; but not for myself." And the softness and womanliness of her voice and mien were such as Ninian had never before seen there.

"I do not quite understand you," said he at last, rousing her from a dreamy silence into which she had fallen.

Mrs. Armstrong seemed to recollect herself, and became reserved immediately.

"Understand me? There is nothing to be understood, except that I was such and such a girl as I described, and I have become myself the woman you see. How I stand in your fair graces, surely I ought not to be so vain as to inquire."

She laughed — almost the first time Ninian had ever heard her laugh.

"I am most glad to see you so cheerful," he answered, with warm sincerity; "and some day you must tell me how and why you did all this."

"How and why! That would be a long, long story, Mr. Græme," she said, and some silent thought sat smiling in her eyes. "But we will talk as much as you please. I like to talk to you, it does me good; it brings back the old, old life —"

She paused abruptly, and broke the conversation by walking to one of the windows where Edmund stood.

"You dreamy boy! so you like to watch the moon," cried Rachel, touching him on the shoulder, at which he started sensitively. "Nay, never blush; I did the same myself at your age. We, every one of us, do the like in our turn, do we not, Mr. Græme? After all, 't is a happy time of life, that of your brother, here. What is his name?"

"Edmund," said Ninian, who had followed to the window.

"Edmund Geoffrey," said the boy himself, who was very proud of being named after the father of English poetry.

"Geoffrey! Are you named Geoffrey?" She drew in her breath, and changed colour for a moment. "That is well — it is a good name. I shall always call you Geoffrey, if I may?"

Edmund smiled a glad consent.

She touched the boy's shoulder with her hand. "You are tall — almost as tall as — Ah, well! do you think it is quite fair for a laddie like you to tower above me, who am no small woman, either? What a man you will grow to — tall and strong! Your arm feels so firm, too; and just the same height as — I told you before that I liked walking with you, Geoffrey." She paused over the name; uttered it softly, in a changed tone; half-sighed; and then, still leaning on the boy's arm, she stood, her head turned away, watching the moonlight.

"Come, if you will grow so sentimental you had better take refuge in my study," said Ninian, somewhat amused, but glad to see that the forlorn Rachel had at last found an interest, and perhaps feeling a sense of

brotherly pride in her liking for his favourite Edmund, who, though contemned at times, was always secretly suspected as the genius of the family. "See, the children are all beginning blindman's buff, or some such awful game. Suppose we three make our escape. I have writing to do; but Edmund can show you his books. You can't think what a student he is, Mrs. Armstrong," said the good elder brother, as he led the way to a little low room, where there was a solitary light "dimly burning."

Here, very soon, Ninian settled himself at his papers, for he had to work hard — how hard none but himself knew — to keep "the wolf from the door" of his large household. But he did it cheerfully — he loved them all so much. Even now, at intervals, he forgot his work, to look up with fraternal pleasure at Edmund's kindling face, as the boy, quite in his element, talked to Rachel Armstrong of his favourite studies, and the books he loved. Her conversation led him on — (and Ninian was surprised to find how brilliant and full of both knowledge and feeling Rachel's conversation was) — he brightened up, and there was an energy and fire in his whole mien that might well have charmed her — as it evidently did.

"Go on; I like to hear you talk," Ninian heard her say to the boy, as they held between them a volume of Chaucer, and were deeply discussing 'Griseldis' and 'The Flower and the Leaf.' "Or, for a change, suppose you were to read aloud. Reading used to be so pleasant to me — so pleasant!" And she shaded her eyes with her hand.

Edmund was all delight. He brought an arm-chair for her, and a low seat for himself.

"No; change places — it is my whim," said Rachel, smiling. "Poets or readers of poets, should surely have the upper seats; — I will be the humble listener. Well, what book have you chosen?"

"Coleridge. Shall it be the 'Ancient Mariner,' or 'Kubla Khan,' or —"

"Whatever you love best. I loved all — once. It is long, very long, since I have read or thought of poetry." She sat down, leaning her elbow on her knees, and looking straightforward into the fire. Ninian thought he saw shadows, heavy and dark crossing her face, which was only visible now and then, in the glimmer of the firelight.

The boy read on; he had a pleasant voice, and felt what he read. There might have been faults, for a truly good reader is about as rare as a truly great poet; but there was that heart-modulation — the echo which lofty poetry ever finds in a nature "yet unspotted from the world." Ah! however we may mock at this in maturer years, calling it sentimental folly, we all feel in our inmost souls that it was *true* — true as love, or death, or the world to come, and all the other awful realities that we sometimes learn to scoff or smile at aside, because we dare not look them in the face. Ay, we may scoff and we may smile for a time, at these dreams of our romantic youth; but when in the calmness of age all things grow clearer to our view, we acknowledge, with a pensive tenderness, that they were happy and heavenly dreams after all.

Rachel sat listening to the boy. Sometimes she looked at him, but not often; she apparently liked best to listen and not look. When he ceased, she started as if from a reverie.

"Go on; read some more. I was very fond of being read to — once." Her lips smiled! but in her eyes was a light sadness; the momentary shadow that always comes over us when we say, "I *was*."

"I will read you my favourite, 'Genevieve.'"

"Ay, do; for I love it — I love it!" she said, her eyes shining with the rare expression that lit them at times, and made their cold crystal depths all ablaze with some inward warmth and glory. "I'll tell you," she added, laying her hand on the boy's knee, — "I'll tell you how I first heard 'Genevieve.' It was when I was quite a girl; four, five years since. What a long time five years seems! Well, well! I am not now what I was then!" And she tossed back her head with a smiling, graceful pride. "But what was I telling you? I forget."

"About the poem, and where you read it."

"*Heard* it; I never read in those days. It was on a moonlight night — a harvest-moon, — I remember; for our kirn had been held the week before. Ah! that kirn!" She paused, but soon went on: "Well, as I said, it was moonlight. Now I was an ignorant, stupid girl — so everybody told me; but I sometimes had strange fancies on moonlight nights and sunsets, or when I was alone; and I had lately begun to gather up my thoughts, wishing I were not so ignorant and foolish."

"How could that be? What made you imagine yourself so?" asked Edmund, with great simplicity.

"Look you," said Rachel, earnestly; "if you were sitting in the dark, with foul things all round you, and yourself poor, and blind, and miserable, — but yet not feeling this, since you had never known anything higher; if, then, there came and stood an angel in your sight,

scarcely looking at you, only standing there, — perhaps once turning towards you with a sort of compassionate interest, nothing more; but still standing there, continually filling you with the light of his presence, showing all things black beside him, showing you above all *yourself* — so mean, so lowly, so vile, — until you longed to tear off the rags you had thought fine garments, and be clothed like him — until you felt happy if you could only crawl near enough to breathe the same air he made so pure and glorious; and — But how I run on," said Rachel, pausing abruptly as she saw Edmund's look of utter astonishment. "You romantic boy! you have made me as poetical and nonsensical as yourself. Was not that a grand apologue I was telling you?"

"I thought you were to tell me about 'Genevieve.'"

"Well; and I will. So, for the third time, I begin: 'It was a moonlight night!' I was walking near the ruins of an old castle, — I and — one who condescended to teach me sometimes. We were talking of our Border ballads, the only poetry I knew. He said —"

"Your master?"

"My master?" The proud woman's head was raised, then sunk again humbly, even smilingly. "Yes, he was my master."

"And what was it he said?"

"Something — I forget. But it was there, from him, that I first heard 'Genevieve.'"

"What a strange fancy for an old village schoolmaster!"

Rachel laughed — the sweet low laughter with which we mask some pleasant secret that lurks behind.

"Eh, but you're a wonderfu' laddie!" cried she, falling into the broad intonation which marked her

humble birth, and which at times peeped out, though in general she spoke with an accent remarkably pure, and was never betrayed into a provincialism that she did not carefully correct immediately. "Come, Geoffrey, read some more, if you are not wearied of me and my little sketches of autobiography."

"Never! I wish you would tell me your whole story from the beginning. It must have been something strange, for your face and manner are strange too — different from any lady I ever knew."

"How so? Do you see anything unlike a lady in me? I know I am utterly ignorant of the world — as ignorant as a child. He said so; but he liked me for that."

"Who liked you?"

"Oh — the — the 'village schoolmaster' you spoke of," said Rachel, with her old smile. "He lent me books, I being just a poor girl, and he a kind-hearted man; and so I became less ignorant — less unworthy. I could not make myself into a lady — a modern lady, for I had never seen one, but I tried to be like one of Shakspeare's women, or Spenser's, or Walter Scott's. And when, after two or three years, my — that is, my master, as you say — came back, he was — not displeased with me!"

"How could he, indeed!" cried Edmund, with enthusiasm. "The kind, worthy man; how he must have loved you me!"

"He did — he did," Rachel murmured, and her whole being seemed to dilate with a rapturous pride. "Mean as I had been, lowly as I then was, and am, compared to him, still he did love me. Nothing shall ever take that belief from me — nothing!" Though her words were resolute, they seemed those of one fighting with a vague trouble. Turning round, she saw Ninian's

eyes fixed upon her; she drew back, and her cheek flushed less in shame than anger. "I hope you have been amused, Mr. Græme, by the nonsense I have been talking to this boy. You have heard it all, of course?"

"I have."

"Well, what do you think of it and of me?" she asked, defiantly.

"Nothing but what adds to your honour, and to my sympathy; nothing that I did not already dimly guess before," he said, in a low voice, as he went out of the room.

"Why do you tremble?" cried Edmund, watching her; indeed, he had scarcely ever taken his gaze of boyish admiration from her face. "Sit down again — let me call Our Sister to you."

"No; I am only tired. It is late — I will go home."

"Then I will get ready to go with you, Mrs. Armstrong."

"*Mrs. Armstrong!* You shall not call me so," she said, sharply; "it is an ugly name — I like Rachel best. You may, if you like, say 'Rachel,' and I will say 'Geoffrey.'" She lingered over the name, as she ever did, with an intonation softer and sweeter than any other word. "Now, my boy, away! I will wait here, and then we can slip out quietly. I do not want to go among your sisters again; they are so merry — so merry! and I — Well, 't is nothing — nothing."

She sat down once more on the stool before the fire, wrapping her arms on her knee and laying her head upon them. For a long time she remained motionless and silent; then murmured:

"It is hard — very hard! Oh, Geoffrey, Geoffrey — how long —"

"Did you call me?" said Edmund, eagerly. He had just come in with his brother and John Forsyth.

"Call *you?*" She sprang up and saw the three. Her flushed face struggled into quietude — she tried to assume the somewhat stately manner she at times affected, in which the innate refinement of her mind struggled with the formality she used to cloak her old plebeian ways. But there was a tremor and restlessness about her all the while.

"I did not expect *you*, cousin John. I wish this boy to be my escort."

"Nevertheless, my mother and I could not rest contented. You are not angry that I came?" said the young minister humbly, while a vague look of disappointment troubled his face, else so saintlike and boyish-fair. As he stood by Rachel Armstrong, there appeared between them that strange contrast which Nature sometimes fantastically wills, putting the man's nature into the woman, and the woman's into the man. Out of these elements union is oftentimes evolved, if qualities so transposed can be called union; but it was evidently not so in this case.

"Why should I be angry, cousin?" Rachel answered. "It is very kind of you; you are always kind. But I had rather walk home with my young friend here; as I told you. Come, Geoffrey!" She linked her arm in that of the delighted boy, and left the room with him.

"John!" said Ninian, after a pause, his kind eyes resting on his friend.

"Well, Ninian!" The young man tried to smile, but his face quivered like a woman's. He apologised; hiding his weakness, as men usually do before each

other. "I am not quite well, I think. I have had an anxious time of late. It will be better for me when all is over." He broke off, seeming to tremble at his own prophecy.

"Yes; when all is over, and you are settled at your manse in the Highlands. Think what a great work you have before you there."

"Ay, my master's work. I ought to give myself wholly to that — I ought — I ought! And yet, Ninian —"

"We are quite ready, and your cousin bade me call you," interrupted Edmund, at the door.

John Forsyth grasped his friend's hand, and vanished instantly.

It was with a thoughtful, even sad gaze, that Ninian saw the three depart. Indulging in a sort of tranquil sigh, as if he congratulated himself on his own serene and unstirred heart, he went back to his book, till Tinie teazed him out of it; and then he sat for a long time, smiling at her chatter, and idly watching the shadow of Hope Ansted's curls, cast on the parlour wall.

CHAPTER V.

"You said it would be better when all was over: well — all *is* over!"

Such was the hoarse, hurried speech which burst from John Forsyth, after half an hour's ordinary chat, and a long interval of silence following. The two friends were sitting together alone in Ninian's study.

Mr. Græme looked up. He had been listening to the clear voices of the girls singing in the next room; thinking likewise how much good they might all do to one another, now that Hope Ansted's freezing boarding-school formalities were wearing off, and her true nature appearing now and then. He had even proposed to himself a plan for lengthening her visit, and sending her with "the children" to the shores of Clyde, if by any means he could afford them a summer trip. Her accomplishments — since of late it had been found out that, though only half-educated, she was externally "accomplished" — would be of infinite advantage to Tinie. For herself, surely the most frozen-hearted young lady in the world must benefit by association with Tinie's frank, warm nature! So pondered the affectionate brother; until his pleasant musings were broken by those three words — ever so full of bitterness — "All is over!"

He forgot himself, and his whole thoughts flew to his companion, his old playmate, whose simple heart had ever been open to him. The contrast in their characters — Ninian's strength and John Forsyth's almost feminine

gentleness — had brought into the bond a degree of tenderness, even affection, such as rarely subsists between man and man.

He laid his hand on Forsyth's shoulder. "John, I know all — or guess all. You may speak to me or not, just as you like. If I could do you any good, being some years older than yourself —"

"But you never felt as I feel. Oh, how I have loved that woman!" Uttering this, or rather letting it burst from him, because the pang was too strong for his control, John Forsyth bowed himself almost in shame.

"You are right; I don't think I ever did feel thus," said Ninian, considerately turning the conversation on himself and from his friend. "I have had my fancies as a boy, and even as a young man. We all have, over and over again, until the world's hard struggle knocks our foolish dreams out of us. And mine were never very serious," he added, smiling. "I love my home and my sisters better than any woman in the land."

"You are sure of that?" cried Forsyth, eagerly.

"Yes, quite sure. Why?"

"Because — Never mind, it was all folly — the folly of a man who thinks all the world must see his idol with his own eyes. But tell me one thing, Ninian. How is it that you are such friends with *her?* How is it that she, who hates strangers, likes you — lets you talk with her, reason with her, even control her? This has almost made me mad at times, though it was, after all, only the influence you seem to have over everybody. And I trusted you, Græme. I knew you would never be so —"

"That I should never be so mistaken as to think in

any but a friendly way of Rachel Armstrong," said Ninian, gravely. "I believe, — and I hinted the same to you long ago, — that any man who did so would only bring sorrow on himself."

"I know it. But in these matters we cannot help ourselves. If we could, what an awful thing that I, a minister before God, with my whole soul lately vowed to His service, should forget it all — all — earth and heaven together, in the passion with which this woman has filled me. Oh! how I scorn and loathe myself!"

It was indeed pitiful to see the change wrought in him who had looked down so serene, so Apostle-like from the pulpit, only a few months before. Ninian was stirred with a feeling of great compassion — more compassion than sympathy, for he was beholding what he scarce understood — how could he! Yet he was conscious of a sort of vague unrest, as if his heart warned him that the agony of emotion he now witnessed was one universal and inevitable as death. It might come to himself in time.

He said, tenderly, "John, we have been boys together. You need not mind telling me anything or everything which has happened. What do you mean by saying that 'all is over?'"

There was no resisting his gentleness; and John Forsyth, in those words, few and broken, with which suppressed feeling ever speaks, told his story — a story which, except under rare circumstances such as these, one man is generally very slow to tell to another — the tale of disappointed love. Unable to bear the solitude of his manse, haunted even in his sacred duties by this passion which had risen up he knew not how, he had

come back determined to risk all, and at once win or lose the woman who had so enthralled him.

"How did she receive you? What was her answer?" asked Ninian, almost as strongly moved as if his own fate had hung upon the balance.

"She gave none; she smiled and seemed at first to believe I was jesting; mocked at the possibility of such a thing as love between us, whose natures were as wide asunder as the poles. I knew that," bitterly added John Forsyth; "there was no sympathy between us in any one thing, and yet I loved her. It often happens thus."

"I believe so, for a time at least," said Ninian; but he had too much tact to intrude his own particular theory on that subject, though from it he drew consolation as regarded his friend.

"At length, when I was half beside myself, she changed her manner to taunting, and asked me what my mother would say to my wooing her, who had been thought mad, who had said of herself, and about whom there had been said, such strange things. I answered, that I cared for none of them — that all her delusions sprang from her fever — that I believed she was the true, pure-hearted girl I had always known her, my cousin, Rachel Armstrong. On which she cried out that it was false, for that she was not Rachel Armstrong; and her old wild looks and wild fancies came over her, until I dared not say another word."

Ninian looked troubled. Whatever he had known or guessed of Rachel's secrets, he had sedulously kept in his own breast. He thought it his duty. But here was a great strait. Keenly he felt it, when John Forsyth, after long waiting for the words of advice, of consolation,

to gain which so many came to Ninian Græme, said in a tone of much agitation:

"Do you think my mother was right after all, and that Heaven has seen fit to lay this awful doom upon one who else would be too like an angel! Do you think my poor Rachel is really mad?"

"No!" answered Ninian; he could not but answer thus. "Still her mind has been touched; she confessed so one day to me. I imagine it was by some great shock. However, we must have patience. If —" and a sudden thought appeared to strike him. "If you would let me speak to her."

The unfortunate lover brightened up; he clung to any straw. "Oh! do speak to her. She may be guided by you."

"We shall see; but I warn you, John, as I warned you before, it is my firm belief that no man living will now win Rachel Armstrong."

Yet she was indeed a creature that many a man might have longed to win. Ninian thought so, when reaching Musselburgh, he saw her who had been called the "daft leddy," sitting, as sacred record touchingly says of another poor maniac, "clothed, and in her right mind." And truly hers was a mind of no common order. Lately Ninian had felt convinced of this, and had supplied her with books, so as to gratify her craving desire for the cultivation of her intellect.

"What marvellous progress you have made in these few months," said he, as, to open the conversation naturally, he took up her books in succession. "Here are your German and Spanish authors, Schiller and Calderon. How fond you seem to be of plays?"

"Yes," Rachel answered, "I like to see humanity as

it is in the drama; not moving calmly along, but climaxing into passion; compressing the emotions of an existence into a few scenes. I feel it all — I could act it all. It is to me like distilling the very wine of life into one draught, drinking it, and dashing down the cup, — as I would!"

Ninian smiled.

"I talk oddly, I know," added Rachel, slightly colouring. "I hope there is nothing wrong in that? You see, I am so unacquainted with the world. When I enter it — as I shall some time — do you think people will ridicule me? In plain truth, Mr. Græme, what do you suppose will be said of me?"

"That you are a rather original but very clever woman." He always encouraged her to the utmost of his power, for her sensitiveness, as regarded every one's opinion, was positively painful. "But tell me, Rachel," said he, drawing his chair to the table, and beginning one of the friendly chats in which they were wont to indulge, "tell me what you mean by entering the world?"

She gave him a quick suspicious glance; then smiling to herself, read a line out of the Shakespeare that lay open at her hand:

"When King Cophetua loved the beggar-maid."

"But you are not the beggar-maid — and, supposing you were such, as yet — excuse me — I see no symptoms of the approach of King Cophetua."

Rachel laughed, nor could Ninian help echoing her. Both were the sort of characters in which an underlying current of humour makes the transition from tragedy to comedy easy enough. After a few minutes of banter-

ing chat, Ninian tried to turn the conversation to the subject which, even while he jested, lay still heavy at his heart. And when he looked at Rachel sitting opposite, her face brightened with returning health, her marvellous eyes shining out from under her heavy hair — that would have driven a painter wild with its rich red tint, like autumn leaves — verily, Ninian ceased to marvel at John Forsyth's frantic passion for this woman.

"Are you qualifying yourself with these for some grand *rôle* on the world's stage?" said Ninian, glancing at her numerous books. "Tell me honestly, Rachel, what did you mean by the remark you made just now?"

"Merely that I suppose I shall not always lead this quiet life with worthy Mrs. Forsyth. In fact, I begin to weary of it already."

"And what do you mean to do?"

"I — nothing! I must only wait — wait!"

"Until there comes to you the usual lot of woman — marriage?" He said the word distinctly, fixing on her his penetrating eyes. Beneath them her colour came and went in painful emotion.

"You are not kind, Mr. Græme; you want to force an answer from me; but you will not, no! as I told you before, you cannot! Think what you like — imagine what you like — for I never yet told a lie, nor will I; even for — But you shall not get a word out of me — not a word!"

"I have no desire, or if I had, no right. But one right I have, that of friendship. I came to talk with you about John Forsyth."

"Ah!" — And Rachel looked sharply at Mr. Græme,

as if to see how much he knew. He did not disguise from her that he knew all. "So!" she answered angrily, "my cousin has told you of his folly, his egregious, consummate folly! How dared he dream of such a thing — and more, how dared he speak of it to me — to me who —"

She stopped. Her eyes flashed, and her right hand impetuously closed over the ring she wore. Ninian saw the action, but continued as if he had noted it not.

"Rachel, I think you should not use the harsh word 'dare.' What presumption is there in any man offering his true honest love to any woman? — that is, if he deems hers still free." Again his eyes met Rachel's, and again she cowered before them, but made no answer. "I do not mean to blame you," Ninian went on. "It is not your fault if you cannot accept John Forsyth; though it is a sore, sad thing to wound one so worthy as he. If done wantonly, a cruel and wicked thing. Love is love, and we shall all find that out sometime or other, I suppose."

Rachel leaned her brow upon her hand, and the angry flush faded, "Ah — yes — that is true," she sighed. "Well, what do you wish to say to me? Speak openly, Mr. Græme; I always listen to and honour you."

"I scarcely know how to say what I must say," answered Ninian, who felt his quiet heart stirred within him, and was strangely puzzled with the new part he had to play. "For myself, I do not clearly enter into these things. I have been foolish in my time," he added, slightly blushing. "I have courted my child-sweethearts, and trembled in sight of my boyish loves, but I never yet wooed *my wife*, as John Forsyth woos

you. It seems to me an awful thing to feel as he does — as I saw him feel to-day. You must not trifle with such a passion — so intense — so absorbing. You cannot even understand it."

"Cannot I?" she said in a low voice. "Well, go on! Poor John!"

"Do you not see how it consumes him in body and mind? — how his whole life seems dried up into one burning thought — how for the time, he is false even to his holy calling, and not even his vows to heaven come before his love of you? If this goes on much longer, he will be ruined — utterly ruined!"

"What do you want me to do?" said Rachel, humbly, for her soul seemed shaken within her.

"To love him, and marry him, if you can."

She leaped up as if stung. "Sir — Mr. Græme — this insult! But I forget!" She paced the room, vainly trying to grow calm. Ninian, watching her, almost reproached himself with cruelty; but the image of poor John Forsyth came between and urged him on.

"And if —," said Rachel, stopping in front of him, her face all one pallor, but resolute and hard as stone — "if I answer, that I will not marry him — that I cannot — that there are reasons —"

"Then, I implore you, give him those reasons! He has a right to know — every man has, who risks his all upon one hope, and loses it. See," he added, taking her hand with a brotherly gentleness, yet solemn withal; "see how openly I deal with you. I would not try you so sorely; but I must save that poor fellow, whose true heart is slowly breaking. Is there, indeed, no hope for him?"

"I tell you," cried Rachel, and her compassion —

for there had come a dawning compassion into her aspect — was thrilled with a rapturous triumph — "I tell you, if I indeed loved John Forsyth as he desires, I could not — dared not marry him, or I should break God's law and man's."

"Wherefore?"

"I must not explain. *He* made me promise that I would not. He said his worldly honour depended on my keeping silence — that he — oh, what am I saying!"

With great pity Ninian looked down upon the young creature, struck by a sudden agony. Was it of sorrow only, or also of shame? A terrible doubt entered his mind, but he cast it from him. "You need not fear me, Rachel," he said. "You are betraying nothing that I have not suspected this long time."

"Suspected — what is it you suspect?"

"That what you said when you were ill was true. That you are married."

"I *am* married!" and she rose up proudly. "I will not deny it. I am married."

Still Ninian's look of deep compassion changed not. Rachel saw it.

"Well, why are you silent? Had we not a right to keep this secret, if we saw fit — I and — *my husband?*"

Oh, the pride, the passionate love with which her lips gushed out that word! Its utterance seemed so divine a music, that all the tumult in her breast grew stilled at once.

She sat down with an air of beautiful matronly repose. "Now, Mr. Græme, you know the truth. None but you, whom I honour more than any man in

the world, except one — none but you should have won it from me."

"Pardon me," said Ninian, struck by the new dignity of her manner. "I meant not to pry into your secrets, believe me, Mrs." — Armstrong he was about to say, but paused, and added, "Sabine."

"Hush, hush," cried Rachel, wildly. "What have I done! I have disobeyed — betrayed him. Oh! my husband — my husband! He will never forgive me. He said he would not." Her agitation became insupportable; she paced the room, wringing her hands, and bursting at times into broken exclamations.

"I kept it so long — this heavy secret! So many deceptions I had to frame — I that never deceived any one before! But that deceit was surely no sin; or if it were — I think, nay, I am almost sure" — her voice sank hoarsely — "I should have done it for his sake. Yet I have suffered so much! He has need to love me — indeed he has!"

"Take comfort, since he does indeed love you," said Ninian, kindly, for his heart melted towards the unhappy young creature — she was unhappy, he saw, though she hid it bravely, "And be sure that I have kept, and will keep your secret evermore."

He stretched out his hand: Rachel grasped it as the drowning grasp at a reed. "I will trust you — I think *he* would. And perhaps he would allow me, in this great strait — Oh, if he did but know how sorely his wife suffers!"

"Then he does not know? He has left you — I mean, you are parted from one another? For a time only, I hope?"

"I will not have you questioning me," Rachel cried,

angrily. "And yet what a poor wayward fool I am! You know part; I ought, for my own honour's sake, to tell you all — but then my husband! What am I saying! — as if anything I could tell might shame him! No, Mr. Græme, he is all good; there is no fault in him. It was only my miserable low estate. By the time I have made myself worthy of him, he will take me home — I know he will!"

Ninian looked the inquiry he could not help thinking, though he asked no more. But something in his gentle, serene face, said, "Trust me, and take comfort in me."

"I will trust you," once more said Rachel. "I am not afraid of you, as I always was of — him that is my husband. But then he was like a god compared with me; in knowledge, in power, in beauty. I felt that from the first moment I ever saw him. It was just the story of Clytie and the Sun. Ah, he taught me that story — all things I ever knew he taught me, or I learned them for his sake."

"It is a strange tale," said Ninian, thoughtfully. "And you, so ignorant and so lowly, to have raised yourself thus! It seems almost impossible."

"How could it be impossible — when I loved him! Nay, not loved, that is too low a word. It was adoration, as wild, as daring, as hopeless as Clitie's for the Sun. Until at last the Sun looking down from his sphere, saw the flower which his beams had wakened into life — saw it, loved it, lifted it up unto his heart. And the poor flower would have been content, even if his brightness had scorched it to death — knowing it had lived one hour there. You think I am going mad again?" continued Rachel, forcing herself to mock her-

self; laughing aloud, while tears of passionate emotion gemmed her eyes.

"No, I do not think so," answered Ninian, simply. "But I wish you would tell me, in plain words, the story of your marriage. If I could do you any good by my advice, or by my friendship, sincere as a brother's —"

"Thank you," said Rachel, with much feeling, "I never had a brother; I never had any one in the world but *him*. Therefore, when after long years of love, I knew that I was loved too; when he took me to his heart, and asked me to give him myself and all my unworthiness — what right had I to say to him nay? All I was or seemed to him of good, he had made me. He did but claim his own."

"And so you were married! How, and where?" was Ninian's blunt question. He was rather puzzled by these excited speeches of the poor girl, whose romantic imaginations were so opposed to his plain common sense. But the intense reality of passion that lay at the depth of all her vagaries, touched him in spite of himself.

There is no influence more soothing, more controlling, more holy, than that which a truly good man has over a woman, when from both some stronger emotion has excluded the possibility of the tie between them being ever more than a quiet, brotherly and sisterly affection; free from all constraint, yet mingled with a reverence, which through habitual intercourse is sometimes lost in the real fraternal bond. This tie — quite different from the "sentimental friendships" that often work so much woe — is indeed true friendship; though softened, perhaps, and unconsciously refined by the difference of sex, which creates in the one power, in the

other submission; as should be ever between man and woman — the greater and the less.

Thus, when Ninian spoke, his calm mind ruling Rachel's, impressed her with comfort and trust. She sat down — she was going to sit at his feet, but paused, remembering olden days. No, she would not show that tender humility to any man in the world but one. So she placed herself opposite to Ninian, saying, in a quiet, subdued way,

"I cannot talk much; besides, it seems so strange to talk of these things to any one. But I will answer what questions you please to put."

"Well, then, tell me first, was one present at your marriage?"

"No one."

"Was it before a minister?"

"It was not."

"Then I conclude it was one of those irregular marriages which we in Scotland hold legal. He acknowledged you as his wife before witnesses?"

"No."

Ninian's start expressed distrust and fear. Rachel crimsoned over face and neck.

"Do you insult me by hinting that — that —" She stopped, as if unable to utter such a possibility.

"I hint nothing, but I plainly ask what form of marriage passed between you and this gentleman? Was it a true marriage, according to the law of Scotland?"

"It was; I knew that, ignorant as I was; and if I had not known it, he said so, which was enough," she answered proudly.

Ninian looked anxious, as a man who knew the world might well look and feel, seeing the utter un-

suspiciousness of this young creature. "Rachel," he said earnestly, "I wish you would tell me the entire truth. I need not add, that it shall never pass my lips. But since by your own confession this marriage must have been private, informal, and probably open to doubt, it is right that some friend should know the particulars, for your own sake, and as a safeguard."

"A safeguard," she answered, contemptuously. "A safeguard against *him!* To place you as a watch between me and my husband!"

"I contemplated no such position," said Ninian, almost exasperated. "And since you think me unworthy of any trust, I had better leave you, Mrs. Sabine."

"How did you know that name?"

"You forget — you uttered it yourself once in my hearing."

"I did, I did!" cried she, in much agitation. "I have betrayed him — disobeyed him. It is no use concealing anything now. Oh, if he knew this, would he ever forgive me?"

"He would, were he an honest, honourable man."

"Do you dare to doubt it? or to throw a shadow of blame upon my Geoffrey?"

"There is generally some blame when a man contracts a secret and irregular marriage," said Ninian, steadily. "Especially as Mr. Geoffrey Sabine," — he pointedly repeated the name, fixing it on his own memory likewise, — "Mr. Geoffrey Sabine probably knew more of the world than did his wife."

"His wife. Yes! I am his wife," cried Rachel, restlessly. "He would not have deceived me in anything. He could not, when I so trusted him — when

we were hand-fasted over the Bible, and he took a solemn oath to me, as I to him."

"Was that all?" said Ninian, in visible anxiety.

Again the angry flush darkened Rachel's brow. "I tell you," she cried, vehemently, "we were married, solemnly and truly, in the way my father and mother, and many another pair in our Border country, were married; by a written paper. Likewise, he put on my finger my mother's guard-ring — here!"

"But the paper — what like was it?"

"Word for word as my mother's was. Now, Mr. Græme, I will not be questioned, nor will I answer any more."

"Word for word as your mother's was," repeated Ninian, much relieved. "It was then no doubt a written acknowledgment of marriage, signed with the name of Geoffrey Sabine?"

Rachel made a slight assent with the head, but her lips were resolutely closed.

"If so, it is certainly a valid marriage. Still, it ought to be confirmed publicly, for his own honour, and more than all, for yours."

There was no answer; only Rachel crushed her hands upon her breast, as if to keep down the woman's pride that, for love's sake, endured such sore humiliation.

"There is one question more I should like to ask. How long is this ago?"

Rachel maintained her obstinate silence. It tried Mr. Græme's patience greatly, but still he maintained his kindly interest.

"Why should you keep up this reserve with me? Do I not already know almost all this mystery? Believe

me, I have no motive but the wish to serve, or, if not to serve, at least to advise and comfort you."

There is something in a good man's voice, attuned to wise and friendly sympathy, which stirs every chord in a sorrowful heart. And poor Rachel's had been so long dumb and deaf to all confidence, shut up within itself, bearing its pangs, its struggles alone. Nothing was heard or seen behind its closed door, until Ninian came and touched the key.

She lifted her head, which had sunk drearily between her hands, and looked him full in the face. Now Ninian was, as before said, one of those whom merely to look upon was to trust.

"I will tell you all," Rachel said at last. "I think my husband would allow me, if he knew you. And what is done, is done! If he will but forgive me," she added, sighing.

"He will — he ought. Now tell me," continued Ninian, wishing to keep her to the point gained, "how long have you been married?"

"A year or more. It was in the winter time. He was very ill. He could not bear our Scottish winters."

"He was not a Scotchman, then?"

"No. He had come a stranger to the neighbourhood, and returned summer after summer, lodging with an old woman — an Englishwoman, named Jane Sedley."

"But — your marriage?"

"Thus it happened. He had, as I said, a long illness. I was half distracted. I would have gone to him through flood and fire; but I was not his wife, and had no right. So, for his honour and mine, that I might nurse him without any after-blame, he married me."

"In the way I concluded — by a written acknowledgment?"

She assented. "We dared not reveal it, for reasons which he explained, and with which I was satisfied. What matter? I would have given him my life, had he asked it! I had little fear of detection — no one minded my goings out or comings in. So, all winter we kept our secret safe. Night after night, when he lay ill, I stole away while all were asleep, crossing the farm-yard with bare feet — lest they should trace my shoe-marks in the snow — walking miles across the country, just to sit by his side for an hour, and tend him, and comfort him. For I was his wife; and I loved him — oh, Heaven! how I loved him!"

Her lips grew trembling and convulsed. She made one violent struggle, and then burst into a passion of tears. Ninian, awed and touched by her emotion, walked aside until the torrent had spent itself, and she was again calm. Then he came and gently took her hand.

"Perhaps, Rachel — you will let me call you Rachel still? for it seems best in every way — perhaps we ought to talk no more to-day?"

"We must, for after to-day I shall keep silence. A few words will be enough. In the spring my husband recovered; we had one month — two months of perfect wedded happiness, meeting continually."

"Some one knew of your meetings? You must have trusted some one."

"Jane Sedley knew. No one else. It could not be," said Rachel, somewhat petulantly. "But those two months — how blessed they were! — until at last he was summoned away."

"Who summoned him?"

"I cannot tell. Some death or other happened. I never asked; I knew nothing about his relations — I only loved himself. I only felt that he was gone, so suddenly that he could not even bid me farewell."

"Did he not write?"

"He never wrote to me; we agreed he should not. It was not safe, considering our secret. He said so, and I was content. Therefore, when he went, leaving me only a message, everything in the world seemed to go from me too. I had a fever first, and afterwards — you know what I was."

"Poor soul," murmured Ninian, in great compassion.

Her silence, and the painful consciousness which made her shrink from saying "I was mad," were more piteous than any complaints.

She went on at last: "It is no use for me to try to remember anything of that blank time. Some fancy connected with you is the first thing I recollect; your coming — your kindness — or some words you said — but all is confused still. I was ill afterwards, and when I was recovering, Jane Sedley came to see me, bringing me something." Her eyes lit with rapturous joy, and she drew from her bosom a letter, or rather a mere note, for there seemed in it only half a dozen lines: "It is from my husband — my own dear husband."

"I am glad," said Ninian — and his acute legal perception made him really glad, for more reasons than one, of this evidence to the marriage, of which the husband seemed somewhat ashamed. "You must carefully keep this letter; is it additional proof."

"Proof of what?"

"Of your marriage, in case your husband disclaime it," said Ninian, with some hesitation.

"I am to doubt him, then?" she cried, indignantl "I am to hold this letter — this precious letter — th only one I ever had — where I see written down thi I am 'his Rachel,' his 'own Rachel' — I am to kee this as a threat against him — as a sign of distrus Look then! See what I can do to show how firmly believe in my husband."

She re-opened the letter — read it — devoure every word with her eyes — kissed it passionately - then put it between the bars of the grate, and saw th fire crackle round it, crisp it, seize on it. Though sh turned pale, and shuddered as if it had been a livin thing in the flames — nay, even once put out her han to snatch it thence — yet she stood still, and let it bur When it was consumed, and of her cherished treasu there remained nothing but a few black airy fragmen stirring among the red ashes — she sank down e hausted.

"I am sorry you have done this," said Ninian Græm who, however, had been effectually restrained fro interfering in the doing of it.

"I that have done it? It is you — only you cried Rachel, in a burst of remorse. "You have ma me burn my husband's letter — the dear letter — th kind letter! Oh, what a wretch am I! And for you - I hate you — I despise you — I —"

"Rachel!" He met her with the calm look wi which an elder brother would meet a passionate chil Very soon she became humbled, and even composed.

"Forgive me, Mr. Græme; I know you are kind an good, and wish —"

"I wish only to aid in making you happy."

"No one can do that. It must rest with my husband and his will. He is gone abroad — I may explain thus much. His fortunes are changed, he tells me; and he cannot yet acknowledge our marriage, or take me home. Home!" she added, with a rapturous lingering on the word. "To think that I shall one day have a home with him! For this I would bear all things — even the silence which he says must be between us until he comes."

"That is hard."

"No — for it is his will, and I am his wife. I love him and obey him."

"God help thee, poor soul!" said Ninian, in his heart. Never so clearly had he seen what true love was. Not that he had ever doubted its existence, but his youthful fancies had melted away; and having been "in love" and out of it — boy-fashion — half a dozen times, he had ceased to believe in, or speculate about such things. His mind, ever pure as it was manly and brave, had engrossed itself with other interests and duties, and other kinds of affection, so that for years he had scarcely thought of love at all. Now at last it crossed his path; showing itself as life's one great reality; touching him not individually, but still passing near him, until he was forced to acknowledge it as a truth that was and might be. It made him thoughtful, not only for others, but himself.

They kept a long silence — Ninian and Rachel. At last the former broke it. "There is one thing which we both seem almost to have lost sight of. What shall I say to my poor friend?"

"What friend?" said Rachel, starting from a reverie.

"John Forsyth."

"I had forgotten his very existence. Why bring back his name? What signifies aught of him?"

"Rachel — that is not like you!"

"No; it is not like me," she said, mournfully. "Ah, but you know now how I suffer. It is no wonder if I am bitter sometimes. Forgive me! Yes, we must think of poor John. What can I do? — what can I say? Help me — do help me. I have no counsellor in the world but you — till my husband comes." She always grew subdued, dignified, and calm, the moment she uttered that name.

"I trust he will come soon; it is right he should," Ninian could not forbear saying. "Meantime, I must save my friend's peace, if possible."

"You will not tell him the truth? You will not be so false as to make me still further disobey my husband?"

"I will not. But this I must tell Forsyth — that he seeks one utterly beyond his hope, since you belong to another. Whether by troth or marriage, I need not say; and he will not ask. If you had only told him this yourself, or at least let him guess it —"

"Was I, a wedded wife, even in thought to anticipate another man's wooing? I never dreamed of such a wrong."

Ninian saw the view her excited fancy took of the case, and argued no more.

"Remember, you have promised!" cried Rachel, half-imploring, half-defying, as he quitted her.

"I have promised. Be at rest!" His face was the face of one who never uttered a falsehood or broke a pledge. Rachel felt it, and was satisfied.

When Ninian reached The Gowans, there was no one at home but little Hope Ansted, sitting with a book by the parlour fire. She looked up, smiling from under her long curls.

"I have read it all through, as you told me; and I like it — oh! so much!"

There was about her at once a childish simplicity and a womanly repose. It seemed to Ninian like coming out of a stormy atmosphere into one of peace and calm. He sat down by her side, and talked to her about the book she read, and other ordinary things, for half an hour. He then rather unwillingly departed, to fulfil his painful mission to John Forsyth.

CHAPTER VI.

"It is a sad thing about John Forsyth," said kind Lindsay Græme, as she saw her brother sitting over the fire in a brown study. "You were thinking of him, were you not?"

"Partly. His mother has got him safe home to the manse, she writes me. Poor fellow! He will recover there. It would have been melancholy had he died."

"One at least would have suffered, and rightly," said Lindsay, with some bitterness, for her heart had always yearned over John Forsyth since the time when he had been a boyish favourite with one she loved. "You never told me what had happened, brother, but I guessed it all."

"All?" Ninian looked alarmed, until he recollected how impossible it was that Lindsay should know more than what Mrs. Forsyth had, in her loquacious sorrow, betrayed to all the family — namely, Rachel Armstrong's extraordinary mental delusions, and the folly of poor John, who on his cousin's recovery had wished to marry her.

"It was a bitter thing for him, and I think Rachel acted wrong," continued Miss Græme.

"We should not judge," said Ninian, briefly, as, evidently wishing to end the conversation, he turned again to his occupation of looking over Hope Ansted's exercise-book. He had taught her daily with his sisters for a long time now.

Lindsay cast more than one doubtful glance upon her brother, as if his short answer about Rachel Armstrong had struck her with a faint suspicion — a sisterly weakness, which all sisters have. After awhile, she said,

"I was pondering, Ninian, how happy we all are together here. Even you seem merrier than you used to be. Only think of Our Brother dancing as he did last week, and as I suppose he will again to-night."

"He cannot well help it," answered Ninian, smiling. "You know it is Hope's birthday, and we agreed to keep it just the same as those of the other children."

"She is, indeed, become one of the children. I never saw a girl so changed. She seems content with us too, though she cannot help feeling her father's cruel neglect. But I am sure she is no burden upon us, bless her!"

Here Ninian — walking across the room to the next — stopped on his way to lean over his sister affectionately, and tell her she was the kindest creature in the world to every one.

"Even to Rachel Armstrong?"

"Why do you speak of her? I know that you two could never sympathise much; you are such opposite characters. Still, Lindsay, you must always be kind to her — as indeed, you are," said Ninian, as he quitted the room.

He was soon seen wandering about the garden — his especial hobby, cultivated by himself, until it had become the pride of The Gowans. All the four girls were haunting him, as usual; never was there such a popular elder brother. Their attentions, however, might not now have been quite disinterested, for they re-

entered the room laden with a quantity of Ninian's beloved roses, to gather every one of which, as he jestingly told them, was like plucking a piece out of his heart.

"Especially the yellow ones. I did not think you ever would have gained that beauty you so wished for, Hope," cried Tinie. "But you and I can coax anything out of brother Ninian, when we get him in a generous mood."

"Ah, you are heartless lassies, both." And Ninian shook his head at Hope, who stood before the glass, fixing the rose in her hair. She made a pretty picture, and he looked at her until his aspect became grave.

"You are not angry, or sorry about the rose," said Hope, noticing him. "If you are, do let me take it back again to the green-house. It will keep some time in water, you know." And with a gentle submissiveness she put it in his hand.

"Foolish child: — what a tyrant you imagine me to be," said Ninian, laughing. "You are not afraid of me now, surely?"

"No, indeed, Mr. Græme." Hope looked up with a frank affection. And — she had such lovely eyes!

"Don't give her the rose again," interposed Ruth, gravely. "A yellow rose means sorrow. You would not give her that?"

"Heaven forbid!" said Ninian, so earnestly, that Hope once more lifted up her fair eyelids in some surprise. "Nay, I will compromise the matter." He went out, and brought in from his little green-house its one white rose — his pet "Duchess of Sutherland" — saying affectionately, "Now, will our dear Hope accept this, with many happy returns of the day?"

Hope thanked him, and resignedly parted with her yellow rose.

"You have forgotten one thing when you wished her 'many happy returns,'" cried Tinie, mischievously. "Something that we all get from brother Ninian on our birthdays, though he looks as if he were a terrible martyr all the while. But if he will not give it, I would take it, Hope, were I you. You little know how nice it is."

At this last *sotto voce* remark, Hope began to blush, as a girl of her age was sure to do. So did Ninian, a circumstance not quite so likely. But he acted up to his duty; he approached his ward and gravely kissed her forehead. Then, after a few minutes' more chatter among his sisters, he took up his books and retired to his own room.

There, despite what Lindsay said of his cheerfulness, the elder brother often passed many a thoughtful hour. Worldly cares frequently weighed upon him; and something he suffered from his kindly sympathies for others, especially for John Forsyth and Rachel. No little trouble too, he had from those wild boys, Hope Ansted's brothers, who, after tormenting his life out for a season in Edinburgh, were at last despatched to their London school. Yet he had borne with them patiently; for, rude as they were, their sister seemed to love them. The first time any real feeling had been seen to burst through the frigid decorum of her education, was when she bade good-by to Willie and Bob. Her guardian had liked her better from that moment. He sat thinking of this now, moralising concerning the evil of such a bringing up, and speculating rather anxiously concerning the future of this girl, so curiously thrown upon his

hands. She was not a child, though her manners were very child-like: she could not be sent to school again. Her father had mentioned, in his rough way, "that Hope must turn governess." But Ninian trembled to send out into the hard world a creature so simple — even to ignorance, and so very pretty. Of late, pursuing this train of thoughts, he had begun to consider the latter fact, and he could not deny its truth. She was certainly prettier than the twins — prettier than even his pet Tinie. There came into Ninian's mind the foolish thought for which he had reproved his sisters — viz., the possibility of Edmund's falling in love with her. But Edmund was occupied with his college studies, and all his spare time he passed at Musselburgh with his friend Mrs. Armstrong. Ninian was rather glad it was so; he really should not have liked the love-epidemic to have entered his peaceful household. Plenty of time for that, years hence!

He had dismissed these contemplations as idle, and was just setting to work, when he heard a timid knock at his study-door, and Hope Ansted stole in. She always seemed to steal or glide about everywhere, she was such a very quiet girl.

"Tinie sent me for a book, if you will excuse me."

"Oh, yes. But she should have come herself, the little lazy thing. Why did she not?"

"She said — shall I tell the exact truth, as you have always taught me to do?"

"Certainly, my dear child."

"That, if I interrupted you, you would not scold me, because I was a stranger, and not your sister."

"Not my sister in truth, but I trust no stranger," said Ninian, as he again bent over his book.

Hope looked over the shelves for the volume she wanted, but, when found, she lingered some time, turning over its pages, and then glancing timidly at her guardian. At last she came to his table.

"You have many letters there, Mr. Græme? Is there one from my father? I thought — he might have written to me to-day?"

There was a pained accent in her voice which touched Ninian; the more so, as she was rarely demonstrative in any way.

"I have no letter for you, Hope; but it may come by the next American mail. Perhaps, since you know your father has many cares, he has accidentally overlooked your birthday. Do not be unhappy, though: it has been remembered, you see."

"Yes, you are all very kind to me." She turned to go away, but turned back, and said, with a strong effort, "Mr. Græme, I heard this morning, for the first time, something about you and my father." Her voice became almost inaudible, and her cheeks glowed painfully; she was evidently alluding to the bankruptcy, and Ninian's generous forbearance. "It makes me ashamed to live here and receive such kindness from you. I wish" — here she fairly seemed inclined to cry — "I wish you would let me go away."

Ninian was quite confounded. In the first place, he had never suspected her of such strong feelings; in the second, he had an instinctive masculine horror of a girl's tears; in the third, the idea of Hope Ansted's going away, presented itself more unpleasantly than he had been at all conscious of until now.

"Are you tired of us, my dear?"

"Tired! I am happier here than I ever was in my life. I love you all dearly — dearly — but —".

"'But' is a disagreeable little elf — especially on birthdays. Suppose we put him out of the question altogether," said Ninian, cheerfully. "And don't imagine we shall let you run away from us, my dear little girl."

"Little girl!" Hope repeated, half-disposed to smile. "Why, I am eighteen to-day."

"And I was thirty-one last month; so you are still a little girl compared with me. Come, don't think of anything sad. Go back to my sisters, and try and feel as if you were really one of the lasses of The Gowans."

"I wish I were! But then Willie, and Bob, and my father — ah! I thought my father would have written." And again the fair eyelids grew heavy with sorrow.

Ninian could not bear to see it. "My dear Hope," said he, "we cannot alter our fortunes; we must only draw from them what sweetness we may. Bear yours patiently, and do not grieve. Think how much my sisters love you — just as if you were their own. And as for me" — he paused — "while your own father is away, you must always try to consider me a father, an elder brother, or — what you like."

"I will," said Hope, timidly stretching out her two hands. She looked so sweet, innocent, and lovable — her face yet pale — the tears on her eyelids scarce dried — that, whether from the paternal spirit dawning in him, or from a sense of paternal duty, the grave Ninian once more stooped and kissed her. She did not seem at all surprised; thanking him affectionately, she took up Tinie's book and disappeared with her light, soft, gliding step.

But Ninian, standing where she left him, was con-

scious of a strange pleasure — a lightness that made everything bright. It was the happiness of doing good, of making others happy, he thought; though without self-glorying, for Ninian Græme was the humblest man alive. Still it was pleasant — he could not deny it — to see this young mind and simple heart expand like a flower, and to know that his patient influence had effected all; that, but for him, this young life, now growing up so fresh and beautiful, might have withered in darkness.

"No wonder I like the child," said he to himself, half ashamed of the act of affection which had given conclusive evidence of the fact. "She is to me as the plants that I rear in my garden. The poor rose-tree, for instance, which I found growing so wild and unsightly, and grafted it, and made it the best rose on the lawn — I like it best of all. It is my Hope Ansted."

Smiling to himself at this conceit, Ninian put aside his books, and joined the rest of the family.

The parlour at The Gowans looked quite festive. It foreboded that terrible event, "a party;" at least as near an approach to one as the girls dared venture upon without offending Ninian's known antipathy to such things. However, he came in smiling blandly, admired the flower-arranged room, and even extended his approbation to the attire of his sisters. They were indeed a pretty girlish group, in their white dresses, all alike. The twins looked sonsie, fresh, and fair; Tinie perfectly bewitching, with the crimson fuchsias drooping among her black hair; and Hope Ansted —

She was helping Lindsay at the tea-table; there was ever a great bond of amity between her and Our Sister. Demurely she sat, entrenched behind the urn, until a

slant evening sunbeam found her out, brightening first her brown curls, and then the one rose — the precious "Duchess of Sutherland" — that, fastened in her high dress, nestled against her throat. Not an "alabaster" throat, as poets will persist in asserting; but one of fair, pink, healthy hue, against which the white rose-leaves contrasted well. Lindsay seemed quite proud of her favourite, and even secretly pointed out to Ninian how beautiful Hope looked to-night! He saw her beauty likewise — saw it as he had never seen it before.

"She appears more of a woman in that dress," he observed.

"Of course she does," answered Miss Græme; "she is eighteen. Our mother was a wife at eighteen; but Hope is such a childlike creature still."

"Yes," said Ninian. Nevertheless looking on the brow, which he fancied wore a deeper thought than ordinary — the brow he had kissed twice that day — he became silent and grave.

Never was there such a night as that night! Half a dozen guests added to the Græme family made up a goodly gathering.

"You know we never invited them; we only told them they might come if they liked," whispered Tinie, in comical apology to her elder brother for the unparalleled numbers. But Ninian did not stand aghast as she expected; he even condescended to put off the slight shyness he generally wore in society, and to be as merry as he always was with his family at home.

"We'll get him to dance — you shall go and ask him," said Tinie to Hope. (Miss Tinie kept floating and flashing hither and thither just like an omnipresent sunbeam.) "There — go up to him — compel him!

It's your right, 'you little birthday girl,' as we used to call one another when we were children."

And when Hope came up with her eyes cast down, in a half-demure, half-playful curtsey, Ninian fairly yielded, and was led off in triumph. They had a most eccentric quadrille, though; for he was, as Tinie observed, "a dear, old, stupid, good-for-nothing donkey," and her own partner, Professor Reay, a long-limbed solemn-browed follower of the sciences, was not much better.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Tinie," said Reuben, who, like most younger brothers, was self-constituted censor-in-general. "How can you force the Professor to make himself so ridiculous! He that was your father's friend and your brother's teacher, and wore his college gown when you were in your long-clothes!"

"What a Methuselah he must be! I wonder if he is grey yet. I'll go and see."

"The age of this fossil formation," Dr. Reay was saying, in his conversation with Ninian, "cannot be distinctly ascertained. But" — here he paused to shake his head, as if a fly had settled on his hair — "but probably we should have to go back to the antediluvian period."

"I think we should," whispered Tinie, behind the Professor's chair. She had loved to play him tricks ever since he was a great, awkward, learned youth — elderly even in boyhood, and she a tiny child on his knee.

"What were you remarking, Miss Christina?" asked he, turning quickly at the sound of her merry voice, while a comical satisfaction diffused itself over his face.

But the little fairy had disappeared in will-o'-the-wisp fashion, and the poor Professor plunged once more into his geological bog.

He was only drawn from thence to be blindfolded, and made the hero of that immortal game — the delight of little children and great ones — from which, too, those solemn folk who have ceased to be either may extract a wholesome moral: for is not life one long game at blindman's buff?

"They are a happy set, are they not?" said Ninian, coming to Our Sister, who sat apart to guard from any accident Edmund's little plaster treasures, "Undine" and "Dorothea."

"Very happy, it is quite a treat to see them." And that she spoke the truth was evident in her face of cheerful serenity — the serenity of conquered sorrow. We cannot — will not believe this in our untried youth, when death itself seems preferable to the thought of a healed wound. But as wound after wound opens, and still life lingers and must linger, — for it takes a long time to die of a broken heart, — then we learn at last to thank God for the balm that allays its torture, for the slow years that scar over its rankling sore. Little sweetnesses spring up in our path; strong, necessary, wholesome duties come like servants to uphold our staggering feet, and we gird our draperies in such manner that they may fall over and hide the grievous wound; marching on so cheerily and well that some closest friends would hardly believe it was there at all, until we lie before them in our death-clothes. And it is no matter *then!*

So Lindsay Græme sat and watched "the children" play, sometimes playing with them, especially when

Hope Ansted asked her. She seemed better than any one to understand this young girl. And Hope, from some cause or other, appeared on this night to have cast off her usual constraint. If Tinie were the sunshine, *she* was certainly the clear, pure cloudland of the family atmosphere; colourless itself, but ready to receive all sympathetic tints dark or bright.

"There's a head for you to study," said Mr. Græme aside to Professor Reay. He pointed out Hope, as she sat holding in her arms Ninian's pet cat, whom she was benevolently trying to soothe in recompense for this terrific invasion of the quiet parlour.

"Conscientiousness, good; range of domestic affections, ditto, especially philoprogenitiveness. Intellectual organs —"

"Not very remarkable, as I see myself," interrupted Ninian; "yet, I assure you, I find far less trouble in teaching her than Tinie."

"Ah! a wonderful steady head has Miss Christina; but she makes no use of it," sighed the Professor. His keen grey eyes wore a dove-like softness as he followed the motions of the wilful girl, who was waltzing with Edmund to a degree that rendered his commendation quite true, though in a different sense to what he meant.

"No fear; she will grow sedate in time," said the loving brother, on whom a word in Tinie's dispraise ever jarred unpleasantly. "I assure you, she takes fits of study as deep as if she were going to be a Professor in petticoats. She sometimes threatens she will surpass even you — a sage philosopher, almost twice her age."

"Ay, twice her age — I know that." And the gaunt Professor, with a slight heaving of his broad

chest, lounged back again to the study. There he sank up to the ears in a large folio, and was missing for an hour after.

In the midst of the frolic — which after Doctor Reay's secession increased more and more — a message came that Mr. Græme was wanted. Ninian went somewhat reluctantly, for he was in the midst of a merry game at forfeits, wherein he had forgotten that there was such a thing as business in the world. He started to see in the hall Rachel Armstrong.

"Well, Mr. Græme, I am here, you see."

"Nay, why did you not come sooner? You know we asked you."

"Yes, yes; but I am so restless, I cannot be quiet anywhere; so my evil genius drove me out, though it is a pleasant night too. Look!" And she held up her shawl, dripping with heavy thunder-rain.

"And so late, too. Were you not afraid?"

"I never yet was afraid of anything," said Rachel, coldly. "Besides, I wanted to talk to you. Nay, let me come in quietly; don't disturb the girls."

Ninian certainly was a general martyr. He lured the Professor adroitly out of the study, and brought Rachel in there; with one rather wistful gaze he shut the door upon the merriment without, and sat down patiently to listen unto what she had to unfold.

"Have you heard from Mrs. Forsyth?" she asked, abruptly.

"I have."

"And how is that poor soul who loved me so well?" The latter words came out bitterly — mournfully.

"He is better: I hope he will recover in time," said Ninian, gravely. "Why do you ask?"

"Because one sorrowful heart can learn to feel for another. Nay, not quite that." And she corrected herself. "Understand me, Mr. Græme; I do not mean that I am unhappy, or have cause for unhappiness, but this state of suspense is hard to bear."

"Very hard."

"I am young in deceit. I cannot even hide my feelings as I ought. I never could before those whom I cared for at all. And when that poor woman sobbed on my neck, and forgot all her prejudices against me, beseeching me to make her son happy — oh! it was a hard trial."

Ninian did not reply. There was no possible consolation to offer, and advice he had hitherto given in vain.

"I can bear it no longer. If I had kept silence for any cause, or any will but that which is my law, I should almost despise myself. Now at last I have done as you counselled — I have written to Geoffrey."

"Did you know where to write?" asked Ninian, in some surprise.

"I imagine my husband would not so neglect his wife as your question implies," she answered, haughtily. "He is abroad. Our correspondence is dangerous — almost impossible, he said, but he will send at intervals to Jane Sedley for tidings of me. There my letter will be found. It explains all. I must tell him the truth: God forbid I should deceive *him* too." And bitterly poor Rachel sighed.

"Did you mention me?"

"Not by name; he charged me never to mention names. I told him the position in which I was placed, and how you, a friend — I merely said 'a friend' —

had accidentally discovered the truth, which I thought it shame to deny. I entreated him to let me follow your advice, and confess all to my cousin, if to no one else. Do you think," added she, turning to Ninian, with the pitiable, helpless doubt which sometimes came over her — "do you think I did right, and that he will forgive me?"

"You have done right, and a good and kind husband would see no need for pardon, no error, — on your side at least," said Ninian, steadily.

Rachel's anger rose a moment, as it ever did at the faintest shadow cast on him whom she thus madly worshipped. Poor soul! in her heart, so young still, was trembling that warning which, once unheeded, has afterwards pealed knell-like through many a heavy lifetime — "Little children, keep yourselves from idols!"

"I know you mean me kindly, Mr. Græme, but you must not speak thus, even in hints. Nor is it generous of you, when my secret is in your hands — when I come to you, as now, for advice, help, comfort."

"Rachel!" Deep, manly, and tender withal, was the compassion in Ninian's eyes.

"I believe you — I trust you; if you had been born my brother, I could not trust you more. God bless you, and reward you! And, whatever becomes of me —"

Her voice faltered, ceased. She started up with an impatient gesture, as if contemning herself.

"Come, I want some amusement — excitement. Let me go and play among the girls, if they will have me."

She left the room; and Ninian, after some sad ponderings over the lot which always seemed to involve him in the strangest passages of human fate, re-entered,

and found her the centre of a delighted group. "She could be so agreeable when she liked," as Tinie observed; but she rarely condescended to notice any one save Edmund. However, to-night she was apparently in her gayest mood — had joined in their new game of acted charades, and was animating them with such life, that the performances of Tinie and Edmund in particular became positive histrionic studies.

They had chosen the easy word "Falsehood," and after creditably indicating the two syllables, were at their wits' end for a delineation of the complete word.

"Couldn't we do a real scene out of a play? Mrs. Armstrong reads plays so beautifully, I am sure she could act one," said her faithful and devoted young squire, Edmund.

Rachel assented at once. There seemed a waywardness about her that took refuge in any excitement.

"Come, Geoffrey, we will do what we read together the other day in Milman's play. I will be *Bianca*, and you shall do *Fazio*. It is but a few words; do you remember them?"

Edmund did; but the lines very nearly went out of his head, when Rachel advanced to him with true tragedy-aspect:

"Fazio, thou hast seen Aldabella?"

And *Bianca* was obliged to prompt her lord's answer:

"Well,
She is no basilisk — there's no death in her eyes."

There was a faint titter; but it was quelled by the next tone of Rachel's voice, so low, so deep; full of that passion wherein the true actress mimics life, in a manner that we oftentimes call unreal, because not one in

a thousand ever sees or feels that climax of emotion out of which tragedy is evolved:

"Ay, Fazio, but there is; and more than death;
A death beyond the grave — a death of sin —
A howling, hideous, and eternal death —
Death the flesh shrinks from. No, thou must not see her.
Nay, I'm imperative — thou'rt mine, and shalt not."

Here, astounded by her looks and gestures, poor young *Fazio* quite forgot his part. Rachel paused a moment, and then, as if the impulse upon her were too strong to resist, she broke out into a speech following, when *Bianca*, stung by her husband's taunts, continues;

"Take heed — we are passionate. Our milk of love
Doth turn to wormwood, and that's bitter drinking. . . .
If that ye cast us to the winds, the winds
Will give us their unruly, restless nature;
We whirl, and whirl; and where we settle, Fazio,
But He who ruleth the mad winds can know.
If ye do drive the love out of my soul,
That is its motion, being, and its life,
There'll be a conflict strange and horrible
Among all fearful and ill-visaged fiends
For the blank void; and their mad revel there
Will make me — oh! I know not what — hate thee!"

"Heavens and earth!" cried worthy, simple-souled, Professor Reay, using his sole adjuration, which might be a fond memento of his two favourite sciences, astronomy and geology — "Heavens and earth! Miss O'Neil herself was never finer!"

Now they all knew, that if there ever had been a bit of romance in the Professor's life, it was a boyish passion for Miss O'Neil — a theatrical adoration, that in its wildest moments never approached nearer to its object than the second row of the pit of the Edinburgh Theatre. But it invested his opinion even now with a sort of importance, which made all eyes turn curiously to Rachel Armstrong.

She, when her lips closed over the last words, had leant, white as marble, against the wall. But there was a power and grandeur about her whole aspect still. The afflatus of genius had been felt by her, and seen in her. It was something like the dawning of a destiny.

"What did you think of Mrs. Armstrong?" said Lindsay, when, all strangers dispersed, and some of the family likewise, she and Ninian, Tinie and Hope, stood together in the darkened room. "It was perfectly astonishing. I would not wonder if, some day —"

"Hush!" said Ninian. He, more than any, had been startled — overwhelmed; not, like the rest, by one thought, but many. They had only admired the glitter, beautiful yet awful, of the flames; he had seen the volcano beneath.

"How did *you* feel, Hope, my dear?" said Mrs. Græme, after Tinie had exhausted her raptures. "Did you admire Mrs. Armstrong?"

"She frightened me," whispered Hope. "I never saw anything like it before. I thought to myself, 'What a fearful thing to be hated by such a woman!' Her very look would kill me."

"Poor wee bird!" said Lindsay, caressing the head which leaned against her. Ninian, too, turned round, half-smiling, to address a few consoling words to the "foolish little creature," who looked quite pale with excitement.

It was strange that, with all his sympathy, warm and true, for Rachel, his consciousness of the critical position in which she stood, and his admiration for her marvellous powers, the last thing he thought of before he went to sleep was the delicate, child-like profile he had seen resting against Lindsay's breast.

CHAPTER VII.

THERE come at times in our life deep, still pauses; when we rest upon our full content, as a child lies down on the grass of a meadow, fearing nothing, desiring nothing, ceasing almost to think, and satisfied only to feel. One of these pauses was upon Ninian Græme. For weeks after that merry birthday-night, there seemed in him a charmed serenity which diffused itself over the whole circle at The Gowans, soothing all their little jarrings — for they had jarrings at times — what large family has not? The storm of rancorous wits ceased to fall upon poet Edmund's devoted head; Reuben and Charlie forgot to jangle, and the twins no longer sat aloof, in their sober good sense, scorning Tinie's harmless vagaries. Tinie herself, who, from a vague jealousy, had once disliked and even ridiculed Hope Ansted, now struck up with her such a close amity, that Ninian christened them "Helena and Hermia." Edmund had even condescended to address a sonnet to them, as "the Red and the White Rose;" but there his admiration terminated. When once there was a vague revival of Tinie's jest respecting his probable love-enthralment, the boy indignantly scouted the idea of being captivated by "such a baby."

Besides, he was saved from becoming another example of the truth of Dr. Johnson's remark, "that many think themselves in love, when, in fact, they are only idle," by being at this time engrossed in studies which had now a new aim. One of those wild projects

which trouble youth — nightmare fancies of honour and fame, often born of mere vague cravings after change — had visited Edmund Græme; and, created by Rachel Armstrong's praise of everything English, had shaped itself into one intense desire. The dream of the boy's existence was to go to London.

Ninian first heard this one quiet Sunday evening, when they two were alone. Lindsay had gone to bed, slightly complaining of illness — she was always delicate, so her retirement was nothing remarkable. The rest of the family were in the garden, all but Hope, who sat up-stairs, and Edmund, who kept his brother company. It was a beautiful thing to see the two together, half-sitting, half-lounging by the open window, Edmund with his head on Ninian's shoulder; for, from the great difference in age, their affection was more demonstrative than is usually seen between brothers; and Ninian often petted and caressed the boy in quite a fatherly way. There was an almost motherly feeling, too, in the pride he took in Edmund's talents, nay, even in his beauty, as, leaning back with his arm round his young brother's neck, he pulled the thick curls one by one. A sudden motion — a slight dropping of the hand, was the only sign he gave of the pain he felt when startled by the declaration of the boy's wild scheme.

"So, Edmund," he said at length, "you want to go and leave me? Is home uncomfortable to you? Do I restrain you in any way?"

Edmund's fervent denial burst forth as his feelings prompted, but still "he wanted to begin the world."

"I had thought of that. It was my intention you should join me in my office-work the day you were nineteen — not long from this."

Edmund muttered the proverbial phrase about "drudgery of a desk."

"Yet at that desk I have laboured and must labour all my life. Once, I too thought it hard: I do not now. And you would have less to contend with than I, being placed not with strangers, but with your brother. Nor would I restrict your favourite pursuits. Your education has hitherto been continued with a view to my seeing my boy Edmund a great man one day."

The younger brother hung his head with a contrite look; but did not retract his words.

"Have you any fixed purpose? What do you want to go to London for?"

"To be — what you said you hoped I should be. And Mrs. Armstrong prophesied so too. I wish to become an author, and write a play."

This daring flight made Ninian smile, but it was rather a sorrowful smile, too. It grieved him to see one of his young birds leaving the nest. He hinted this.

"Yet we must all leave it some time or other," answered Edmund; "or else" — and he blushed beforehand at a speech which he would never have ventured except in his present chafed mood — "or else it may be with us as with the young birds that stay behind — we may be pushed out."

"What do you mean?" asked Ninian, quietly: though his colour rose.

"That — that" — and the boy hesitated; but Ninian's truth-compelling eye was upon him. "We may not always have a home with our brother; he may marry."

"Did Mrs. Armstrong put that into your mind, too, my boy?"

"No: but many others have. Nothing is more likely."

"Nothing is more unlikely!" The firm voice indicated that Mr. Græme wished to cease the subject. A year ago he would have turned such a possibility into a merry jest, but somehow he could not now; perhaps because he had lately seen so much of the reality of these things in the cases of Rachel and of John Forsyth. He sat thoughtful awhile, and then said:

"I will tell you what we will do, Edmund. Stay with us a few months longer, until the session is ended; then, if you like, you shall go for a year to either of the London colleges."

"I did not mean that, my kind, good brother! I meant to go on my own resources: to fight my own way, earn my own bread, and be independent."

"Ah! my boy, at your age, to be 'independent' in London, means to starve. We must not think of such a thing while I can manage it differently."

"But then what would it cost? Not much, I hope," said Edmund, driven by his earnestness to view the matter in a far more worldly light than he usually condescended to regard anything. "I would live in a garret — all poets do so at first, I think. I should want very little food; I never do when I am writing. And then, when I had sold my play and got it acted, I should be so rich — so happy."

So cried the boy, in that delirium of aspiration which genius of his kind — the most sensitive and brilliant, though not the greatest — almost always experiences in youth. His brother smiled, but rather absently, as if he had been thinking of something else. And when, touched by so much kindness, and moved to confidence

of speech by the darkness, Edmund opened the floodgates of his heart, and poured out all its hopes, resolves, and desires, still Ninian's voice, though always encouraging and pleasant in tone, sounded rarer and rarer. He was thinking much.

They heard the girls' voices up the avenue.

"Edmund," said Ninian, suddenly, "I have one thing to beg of you. Do not let the rest of the children ever hear you speak as you did to-night."

"About my going away? Not if you desire it."

"No: but about — the possible change you alluded to. I tell you, it is impossible. I knew that from the time our father died, and so have never thought about it."

"About taking a wife do you mean, brother?"

"Hush! nonsense! Don't let the girls hear. Here I am, the Head of a Family, and here are my six bairns. Come, Edmund, let us go and meet them."

He stepped out of the window, and soon his cheerful voice was heard along the alleys of the garden. He walked, with Tinie hanging on one arm, and Charlie pulling at the other: the inseparable twins, Esther and Ruth, forming the convoy behind. They all seemed to make more fuss over him than usual, since this was the last Sunday they would be at The Gowans for some weeks. For the hundredth time in his life, Ninian Græme had illustrated the adage of "Where there's a will there's a way." That very day he had put in Lindsay's hands a purse full enough to take the whole party to the shores of Clyde. So within two days they were all to be despatched, leaving the master of The Gowans to enjoy its solitude.

"But you will run over and see us sometimes, or I'll

not go at all," said Tinie, with an affectionate pout. And Hope Ansted, who seemed to love Ninian, and to testify her love, as much as any of his sisters, echoed the same valorous determination, reinforced by the mute pleading of her eyes. Whereupon her guardian said that he might come, and vowed to himself that he would, even though he were to work night and day in order to compass it.

They all sat up quite late that Sunday night talking of the blue Clyde, the shadowy giant-peaks of Arran, the Holy Loch, and the purple Argyle hills; planning pleasures all but impossible to realise in this dull work-a-day world.

But *l'homme propose, et Dieu dispose* — we never tire of the motto; so true, so universal, echoed solemnly by the events of each year — each day. Before the family could leave, Miss Græme's illness increased upon her, and at last was found to be that horror of horrors in a large household — an infectious fever. Great was the sorrow and consternation; but Ninian's decision ruled all.

"The children must go — and go at once," said he, feeling that, humanly speaking, the lives of the little flock were in his hand. And though Tinie rebelled, and Esther and Ruth came hand-in-hand, with the rare tears visible in their eyes, to entreat they might stay and nurse Our Sister, still Ninian was firm.

"I will fetch a nurse; she, and Katie and I, will be sufficient to watch over poor Lindsay," said he to Reuben, the only "man of sense" left among the brothers, for Charlie was frightened out of his wits, and the gentle, tender-hearted Edmund was in agonies of grief. "They must all start to-day, as we planned: you

had better manage it during my absence in town. I will send back word that they must go."

Ninian's "must," so seldom used, was, when used, as authoritative as the laws of the Medes and Persians. On his return, he found his household were all dispersed. A great change it seemed; he almost regretted not having said good-by to them, especially to Hope, whom he had scarcely seen for two days. He remembered, with a vague pain, that she was the only one who had not come and begged to stay behind: but then she was not of the family, and could not be expected to feel as Lindsay's own sisters did.

He soon forgot all this in the alarm of the moment; in thinking of her danger who had been his guide and companion so many years — she to whom he was himself so dear — the dearest one now living. He knew and felt this more than ever now — that of all his brothers and sisters, nay, of every human being, there was none who loved him like poor Lindsay. He stood outside her door and listened to her ravings, when, fancying herself a girl once more, she talked of circumstances now long past, and known to none but him. There he stayed, until he could bear it no longer, but rushed out into the garden; walking up and down until the damp evening mist began to fall.

There was a light in the parlour. He thought it strange — that is, if he thought at all about it — and went in. The tea was laid; and at the table, looking sorrowful, yet sweet and very calm, sat Hope Ansted.

She came forward contritely. "I hope you are not angry, Mr. Græme? I — I could not go, indeed!"

He was so astonished, that at first he made no answer. His next impulse was to snatch her up himself

and carry her away from the reach of infection. His third, and most reasonable one, was to pause and remonstrate with her.

"Child, child, what have you done? It is useless; you must go, and this very night."

Then, seeing that she made no opposition, except in the mute pleading of her sorrowful look, he began to think how grievously he had misjudged this girl. Quiet as her nature seemed, what heroism of affection there must be in its depths to induce her to act as she had done! His heart melted with tenderness, even reverence, as he said, gently:

"Dear Hope, why did you do this?"

"Because — I could not help it. Ah! do forgive me!"

"Forgive you?"

"Yes; for telling Reuben that though you ordered the others, you were not my brother, and had no right over me. Otherwise, he would not have let me stay; and then I should have been so very, very miserable."

"Poor little thing — poor loving little thing," said Ninian, laying his hand on her long curls. He was deeply touched — more than Hope had ever seen him. She drew his hand to her shoulder, and leaned her cheek upon it, in a daughter-like way, or as Tinie did.

"Then you will not let me stay — to be useful to you, and to nurse dear Lindsay?"

"But, my child, do you know the risk you run? If it is such that I will not expose my own sisters to it, how can I expose you? I must not, indeed."

"I do not think that reasoning holds good. Tinie, and Esther, and Ruth have all got ties in the world — I have no one belonging to me — at least, as good as

none. If I took the fever and died, you know it would not signify. I should not be missed."

She said this with a sorrowful simplicity that went to Ninian's heart. He was about to answer — with an emotion strange to him — that *there* indeed would be sorely missed the image of his lovely, winning pupil, who crept in closer every day; but the very possibility struck him with intense pain. And to it was added some other inexplicable restraint, so that the thought died unuttered. He only said in a quiet way, "You must not think so, Hope," pressed her hand kindly, let it go, and sat down.

She took her place at the table, and began to pour out tea — in a timid, trembling fashion, for it was the first time she had ever done so. Once or twice Ninian said resolutely to himself, "To-morrow she shall go;" yet it was pleasant and comforting to have her sitting there to-night, instead of being left alone in his anxiety. They talked of Lindsay, and Hope told him, in her simple-worded style, what the doctor said — what the nurse thought; — until she contrived to leave a hopeful impression on his mind. His tea-table still seemed pleasant, and not lonely; until he paused to remember that though the children were all away, yet he scarcely missed them. And immediately some words of Edmund's on the Sunday night came back painfully. Was it, could it be possible, that in future time some one, any one — he still sedulously kept his mind to generalities — might come and take in his heart a nearer place than they?

When tea was over, Hope rose. "I shall not see you again to-night, Mr. Græme; I am going to Lindsay."

"Good Heaven!" cried he, brought back to the sense of all she was doing for his sister. "Do you think,

child, I will suffer you? Suppose you should take the infection?"

"It is too late now," she answered — and something of the firmness which the most yielding of women have when their affections are concerned, came into her manner. "It is no use talking, Mr. Græme. If I am to catch the fever, I have caught it already; for I have been with her both night and day. And no one shall take me away from my dear Lindsay, whatever be the consequence."

So saying, she quietly walked out of the room.

For days and days she and Ninian met at their brief evening meal, talking sometimes in agonised suspense, sometimes in faint hope, according to the tidings Hope brought from the sick chamber. She spoke in grave, womanly fashion; she seemed to have grown years older through this time of trouble, aud beneath the responsibility which she had taken upon herself. Ninian ceased even to treat her as a child, and talked with her seriously, trustingly, about all things that concerned the stricken household. He owned to himself the while, that though she had not Tinie's liveliness or brilliant powers, yet there was a simple wisdom in all she did, that made him trust her more than he had ever done his pet sister.

So they passed the time, meeting but once a day; except when, each morning, Ninian came to poor Lindsay's door, which he was forbidden to enter. He resisted not the prohibition, for his life was not his own, but belonged to those unto whom he had devoted it. Thus, he was content, ere he left each day, merely to meet Hope on the landing — she would not let him approach nearer — and receive from her the critical tidings.

"You would not deceive me, child?" said he some-

times, when his anxiety was insupportable. "You will promise, that if anything goes wrong, I shall see my sister?" And Hope, to soothe him, would take upon herself a womanly strength, quite different to her former girlish submission; telling him how wrong he was to make himself so wretched, when there was hope for Lindsay, since her fever had been of a far less dangerous character than was at first feared, and she would soon be recovering.

At last the news came that all danger had passed, and Our Sister would soon be herself again. "But you must not see her yet — indeed you must not. It is a terrible thing — fever; we must keep you safe, Mr. Græme," cried Hope speaking excitedly and hurriedly.

Ninian looked alarmed. "But what is the matter with *you?*" said he, approaching, as she leaned over the balustrade to speak with him. "Your eyes are glittering, your cheeks flushed."

"Yes, yes, I could not sleep last night, for joy I think. Never mind, it is no matter. We must all be very merry now."

And she laughed, poor child, in a way that made Ninian start. "Give me your hand," he said, hurriedly. "Let me feel your pulse."

"No, no, you must not touch me, you must not come near me," she cried, drawing herself backward from him. "Go away, go away! Good-by!" She escaped back into Lindsay's room, and shut the door.

It was indeed a long good-by. She was missing at tea that night, being exhausted with watching, the servant said. Next morning Ninian was at the staircase — their sorrowful trysting-place — but Hope did not appear. At night her shrill ravings were the first sound that met his agonised ear; — she also had taken the fever.

CHAPTER VIII.

Lindsay recovered fast, but for a long time her faithful young nurse hovered on the verge of death. On Hope, as on many who have caught infection from their self-devotion to others, the fever seemed to have seized with tenfold violence. There was but a hair's-breadth, the physician said, between this frail young life and eternity. Then, in his agony of fear, even remorse, as though he had been the cause of all, Ninian found out how closely round his heart had twined "that child," as he called her still. In what sense he loved her, whether as a child or as a woman, he never paused to think; but that he did love her more intensely than he had ever dreamed, was most true. He knew it, because he felt that her life was as his life, and that her death, or the very contemplation of such horror, would make the world so black that he dared not look upon it.

Still, he called her "the child," and "my child," nor made any secret of the wretched anxiety which consumed him: the reserve of passionate love had not yet come. He never tried to hide from Lindsay what he suffered; nor abstained from haunting Hope's door, as he had before haunted his sister's. But when, after the crisis, the first glimmer of hope came — when, listening through the open door, he heard one faint tone of her natural voice, and not those frightful ravings — the revulsion of feeling was such that at last it taught him concealment.

He spoke not a word — he could not speak; but walked down-stairs, and out of the house. There, in the darkness — for it was so far in the night as to be nigh upon dawn — he stood under the starlight, hearing the rustle of the trees. His throat swelled — his heart seemed bursting. With a strong gush of passion — the strongest his life had ever known — he threw himself on the earth, and among the damp, dewy grass, fell more than one tear, wrung from his manly eyes.

Long time he lay, watching the little stream of light from the one window in the gloomy house — watching, and feeling that he could not go to rest; he could only sit there, forgetting everything on earth, except that "the child's" life was saved.

Lindsay was quite well, and had resumed her household duties, ere poor little Hope was able to quit her chamber. When, at last, she was moved into Miss Græme's dressing-room, and Ninian saw her for the first time, he marvelled to perceive how illness had changed her, bringing into her young face a womanly expression — a thoughtfulness which had never been there before. Over the stillness of her beauty flitted shadows of the awakening heart.

Ninian had thought, and Lindsay too, that his first impulse would be to embrace his pet, his pupil, his darling child, restored as it were from the grave. Even Hope seemed to expect it, for, smiling, she half-lifted her feeble head to meet the kiss she had so often shared with Tinie; and not receiving it, had looked disappointed a moment, until she saw how much Ninian was moved.

"Indeed, Mr. Græme, I am not worth your caring for me so much — you and Lindsay," the poor child said, faintly. "What trouble I must have given you! It

seemed almost like being punished for disobeying you, and not going away with the others."

"I wish you had — I wish you had!" murmured Ninian.

"I don't, though!" And she looked up at Lindsay, who stood on the other side of her sofa. "I think, putting all things together, I have never been so happy in all my life."

It might be true. Sickness is very often restful and sweet; and trouble that awakens or draws together affection, is scarcely trouble at all.

"That is rather hard, my love," said Lindsay, in playful reproach. "To have felt happy, when Ninian and I, not to speak of the poor children away, have been all breaking our hearts for you!"

"Breaking your hearts? Ah, then, I'll soon get well, and piece them together!" Hope answered in the same light strain — there seemed such brightness let in upon her life. "I must — I must get well, that we may all go to the Clyde, as Mr. Græme says. If I could only come down stairs now."

"Foolish child! when you cannot even stand."

But the sickly longing for change would not be restrained. So the next day it was agreed that she should be taken to the quietest room in the house — Ninian's study. He spent an hour or two clearing its dusty shelves, and making it pretty for the poor invalid's eyes. And, though he was not much given to fanciful tastes, or bits of sentimentalism in the floral line, he even took the trouble to arrange flowers among the worm-eaten bookcases. Nay, he actually paused to admire them, — the white jasmines leaning their bonnie heads against

the law-books; like the delicate little creature that was about to be domiciled in his dusty old study.

He went at length to carry her down stairs. That was the most brilliant part of the plan; Hope had even made an attempt to clap her hands in Tinie's fashion, when Lindsay proposed it, though she afterwards recollected herself, coloured slightly, and was afraid it was troubling Mr. Græme too much.

But Ninian looked so pleased to see her childish delight, and told her gaily, "that he would carry her from thence to Constantinople, if it would do her any good. Besides, she was such a little light creature — a mere feather to a great powerful man like him." And for once in his life, Ninian looked with some little pride at the reflection of his fine manly person in the mirror.

"I'm strong, if I'm no bonnie," said he, laughing. "You are not afraid to trust me with your valuable little self, Hope? You know I'm only going down stairs — not up to the top of a mountain — you remember that story we once read of the German princess being carried up a hill by — by —" He broke off in his sentence, but Hope finished it merrily.

"By her lover — was it not? And he died on the top, poor fellow! Truly I am glad the journey is only down stairs, for I should not like to kill my kind guardian as she killed her lover."

Ninian was silent.

"I have not vexed you, have I, with turning your pet story into a jest?" continued Hope, anxiously. "You know I am not clever like Tinie, but I always admire whatever you tell me to admire."

He patted her on the head — called her a good child, and lifted her in his strong arms. But as he held

her there, poor little trembling thing! close to his breast, the German story entered his mind — strangely — wildly. A dizziness came over him, he even staggered. Hope faintly screamed.

"Don't be frightened, my child — my darling!" said he. The words — words that he had never used before, not even to Tinie, burst from him unawares; he was scarcely conscious of them, till afterwards. And to Hope, from the great difference between her years and his, they seemed quite natural.

"Never mind me — I feel quite safe — only I am so foolish," she murmured, hiding her face so as not to see the "grim descent." There was a curl of her hair trembling outside her shawl; with an impulse impossible to resist Ninian pressed his lips upon it. None saw the action — Hope never knew it; but it betrayed the truth. It was a kiss — the last of calm affection, the first of passionate love. He knew now that the creature he held in his arms, dear as his life, was to him the woman and not the child.

He laid her down — she leaned on Lindsay's breast, pale with exhaustion. But he dared not look at her, or speak to her. He muttered something about leaving "the child" to rest — went out of the room, and was not seen for hours.

Women, and especially young women, either believe falsely or judge harshly of men, in one thing. You, young loving creature, who dream of your lover by night and by day — you fancy that he does the same of you? He does not — he cannot; nor is it right he should. One hour, perhaps, your presence has captivated him, subdued him even to weakness; the next he will be in the world, working his way as a man among men, for-

getting for the time being your very existence. Possibly if you saw him, his outer self, hard and stern, — so different to the self you know — would strike you with pain. Or else, his inner and diviner self, higher than you can dream of, would turn coldly from your insignificant love. Yet all this must be: you have no right to murmur. You cannot rule a man's soul — no woman ever did — except by holding unworthy sway over unworthy passions. Be content if you lie in his heart, as that heart lies in his bosom — deep and calm, its beatings unseen, uncounted, oftentimes unfelt; but still giving life to his whole being.

Thus, Ninian Græme, the same day, the same hour that his delirium came upon him — for at all ages and under all circumstances love's wakening is ever a delirium — went as usual to his office and worked. Once or twice there seemed to come flashing round him an inexpressible light and joy. He felt on his lips the touch of the soft, soft curl; while evermore his heart sang to itself the words "my darling."

But still he kept working on. Truly, he had in him the most royal power a man can have — rule over his own soul.

He chanced to have many visitors in his office today; among the rest, one who, had he been in a less joyous frame of mind, would hardly have been welcome. But he was in a mood to have felt kindly towards his greatest enemy; he certainly did so towards a man whom he had no real cause to dislike — Mr. Ulverston.

"What, back again in Edinburgh?" said he, when that gentleman made his appearance. "I thought you were going abroad."

"So I was, or intended to have gone this long time,

but somehow, I keep on paving a certain nameless road — it is my way," answered the young man. "But I have some excuse — business. I am sure that confounded fortune of mine has given me trouble enough in a year and a half."

"I thought," said Ninian, in some suprise, "that you had had it all your life — that you were one of those lucky fellows 'born to greatness,' as Malvolio says."

"In a measure, certainly;" and he looked slightly confused, as proud men do who have made an unpleasant slip of the tongue. "However, I was not born to the Ulverston greatness, but had it thrust upon me! I wish sometimes, my old uncle had cut me off with a shilling, instead of leaving me a fortune and a name," he muttered.

But Ninian had not heard; he was answering a message at the door, "Say, if she can wait in town an hour or two, well; if not, I will be at Musselburgh tomorrow."

"So you still keep up your journeys to that redoubtable place, Musselburgh? I begin to think there is some reason for it. Has our young friend Forsyth any sisters?"

"No," said Ninian shortly. Mr. Ulverston shrugged his shoulders and began talking of something else; his disposition seemed so pliable, that he could bend himself to any one's humour. But Ninian's was almost beyond him, for in truth the young man was very busy, and Mr. Ulverston's conversation, however brilliant, was considerably hindering him. At last he told him this, in his frank way — for Mr. Græme had the kindliest power of telling straightforward truths, without vexing anybody.

"So you fairly want to turn me out. That is rather too bad, when I have only a short time to spend in Edinburgh, and shall be off by the next train to Glasgow. I am going to try to kill a month or two — likewise a few deer — in the Highlands. I fear it will be dull work, for a miserable solitary fellow like me."

"Why don't you marry?" said Ninian, smiling at his dolorous face.

"Marry! The devil! What business have you — I beg your pardon, Mr. Græme, I suppose it is your business. It's everybody's business to get a 'man of fortune' married. I've found that out already," he added, his first angry tone subsiding into one so bitter, that Ninian felt quite sorry for him. This poor, rich man, might have suffered some hidden trouble, even wrong. The young Scotsman thought he had yielded too much to prejudice; and out of compunction, went so far as to possess himself of Mr. Ulverston's travelling intentions, unfolding his own, and even arranging a meeting on the Clyde, near the Gairloch, where the young Græmes now were.

"I will not turn you out from thence, as you say I do from my office to-day. Though indeed there is no need for you to go, if you will content yourself with a book."

"One of your stupid law-books, I suppose," laughed Ulverston.

"Nay, they are not all stupid," said Ninian, examining his shelves, "here is a volume of trials, concerning our marriage laws; it might amuse you to see how easily the bond is formed and broken in Scotland."

"Give it me — give it me," cried the other, eagerly. "Nay," and he laughed, "you don't know what use it

may be to me in my 'novel of Fashionable Life,' if I ever write one."

He must, indeed, have found the book interesting, for he sat engrossed therein until Ninian's hour for departure and then with a hasty adieu quitted the office.

Mr. Græme soon followed, for he was longing to reach home — the home no longer sad, but filled with inexpressible joy. He felt, though he did not analyse his feelings, like a man who has awakened suddenly one morning, and found himself rich; who stays not to count his riches — scarcely even to ascertain their reality; but walks along under a golden mist of happiness, upon which he dares not look lest it should melt into nothingness.

For the first time in his life, Ninian forgot an appointment; nor recollected it, until, when near The Gowans, he heard quick footsteps overtaking him.

"Rachel! I am so sorry. Indeed I have no excuse to offer."

If he had, she would not have heeded it. Her whole manner indicated the wildest excitement.

"She has seen him, Mr. Græme. Jane Sedley has seen my husband. He has come back — he is in Edinburgh, near me, and yet I know not where to find him."

"Nay, be composed, lean on my arm, or else sit down a minute on this stone," said Ninian, as they entered the quiet lane which led to The Gowans. "How exhausted you seem!"

"I have been walking up and down Edinburgh streets these four hours, hoping by chance to meet my husband. He is here — I know he is here. Find him for me — oh, Mr. Græme, for the love of Heaven find him!"

"I will try — indeed I will," answered Ninian, soothingly. "But you must first tell me all particulars."

"Yes, yes, let me think a minute," said Rachel, making a violent effort to collect herself. "You know I forwarded my letter to Jane Sedley — he was to send there every month for news of me: but — he never has sent. That signifies little — he had surely some good reason. Now he is come back, I shall see him again — my Geoffrey — my husband." And she trembled all over in her paroxysm of joy.

"But you said Jane Sedley saw him. How was that, and where?" pursued Ninian, anxiously, for his keen common-sense pierced further than the blind love of the unfortunate wife.

"I'll tell you. She had come up to Edinburgh to see me, and to bring me back my letter. And there, driving down Prince's-street alone in a grand carriage, she saw a face like his. It *was* his — nobody could mistake my husband's face."

"Did he observe her?"

"She thinks he did, for she ran after the carriage. He did not stop to speak to her; how could he! He could not shame himself in the street, you know, talking to a poor old woman. But he had the letter — she threw it into the carriage. I fear he will be angry — still — he had the letter! — and we shall meet — we shall meet! —"

"He knows, then, where you live?"

"No, no. I mentioned neither names nor places; he always charged me not. And what were the Forsyths to him? He never heard their names, nor wished to hear. He said, since I had no near ties, all my other kindred, so far beneath his, must be forgotten, as if they

had never existed. And no marvel! Alas! even if we met, he might be ashamed of me."

"Surely he would not."

"No; you are right. He is too noble!" cried Rachel, rising up with a proud demeanour. "Still, I must find him; this suspense is horrible. Perhaps, even now, he may be but a street's length from me. I cannot rest — I must go back to Edinburgh."

"I will go with you," said Ninian, forgetting everything in his compassion for the poor young creature — a wife — yet no wife. "Only let me run home for a few minutes to see Lindsay. Will you come — or are you still afraid of the fever?"

"For myself, no! But I am not my own. I must run no danger for Geoffrey's sake. I will stay here in the avenue."

There Mr. Græme left her, and hastened to the house. Lindsay met him with a smiling face.

"The child is still keeping well. She is asleep now in the study. You may go in and look at her; but be very — very quiet."

There was no need to tell him that. His whole nature — once somewhat cold and hard — seemed softening into inexpressible tenderness. When he looked at the girl, lying asleep, pale and fair, he longed to take her and hide her in his bosom; bidding her nestle there like a young bird, and sit and sing, safe from all harm, all her life through. Still, he only thought of her as his darling — his cherished one — the flower he had saved from perishing. He had never yet breathed to himself the words, "*My wife.*"

He tore himself away, and went back to Rachel.

Putting aside all other thoughts, he turned his mind to her service in this emergency.

She was restlessly walking about. "You are come at last. Let us start. I tell you, I must see him, or I shall go mad. Think, all this day I have been walking — walking; every footfall, every face, I have imagined was his. I always had that fancy. Many a time I have followed down whole streets any one who was like him, or who reminded me of him, and then at last have beheld some fool's face. As if I could hope to see anywhere in the world another face like my husband's."

Ninian smiled — but it was a sad smile. He did not chafe under her wild romance, now. He began to find out that the wisest, the oldest of us, are, while beneath one mighty influence, dreamers of fantastic dreams.

But he had still power over himself, and over others, especially this poor troubled spirit, of which a curious destiny had made him the only stay. He proposed to inquire at every hotel in Edinburgh for "Mr. Sabine."

Rachel started at the name, so long unspoken; but immediately a sort of pride dawned in her face. "Yes, *Mr. Sabine.* You may call him so now. It is a good name, is it not? I had need be proud in bearing it."

With a firm step she followed Ninian to hotel after hotel — never speaking, never lifting her veil. In apparent indifference the question was asked; she heard bandied about, screamed from attendant to attendant, the name whose mere utterance seemed so sacred, a name distinct from all other names in the wide world. Sometimes, Ninian felt her grasp his arm tightly, but she never said a word. Save that, when from each place

they went away, the search still vain, she would whisper hoarsely, "Once more — only once more."

At last, even Ninian gave up in despair. No one even seemed to have heard of the name of Sabine. And in a small city like Edinburgh, where at the dead season of the year every arrival of any consequence was sure to be bruited abroad in the hotels, it was next to impossible they could have missed the object of their search.

"Either he has never been in Edinburgh, except just passing through, or else he is gone from thence. It is no use; alas! you must have patience."

"Patience!" she repeated in a tone of agony. "Patience! oh, Heaven!"

"You say well; Heaven only can help you, my poor Rachel," answered Ninian, soothingly, but firmly, for his judgment warned him that this was only the beginning of sorrows. Despite all the forsaken girl's faith in her husband, he who knew the world better could not repress the doubt that under this great mystery was enveloped some great wrong. They were in one of the streets which, leading out from the blaze of Prince's-street, appear at night so quiet and lonely. There he let her rest a moment, she leaning heavily on his arm, while he, unwilling to intrude on what he knew must be deep misery, stood silently watching the lights of the Old Town, with a few stars twinkling over it through the cloudy night. He was thinking how many woes and crimes lie under life's outer gloss, even as that fairy city, seen by night, is one great corrupting mass of wretchedness by day. And then he thought of the man, whoever he might be, who, perhaps, had lately rolled in his carriage down the same street where his unhappy wife

now stood, crushed under the burden of her bitter sorrow.

Suddenly Rachel dropped his arm — "There — there," she gasped, and staggered forward. Ninian looked, and saw turning the corner of Prince's-street the dim figure of a man, to him quite beyond recognition. But not so with Rachel: excited almost to frenzy, she darted forward — "It is he — it is my husband!"

The next moment the figure had leaped into a carriage which dashed off at full speed, and was out of sight in a minute.

"Follow him! follow him!" shrieked Rachel; but the sound died on her lips — her feet refused their office. She sank in utter insensibility. Some time after, the cold wind blowing through the avenues of The Gowans, recalled her to herself.

"Where am I? what are you doing with me?" she cried.

"You have fainted, and I am taking you in a carriage to stay the night with my sister Lindsay."

But with a wild cry of "My husband — I must follow my husband!" she tried to open the carriage-door. Ninian had to grasp both her hands fast, ere he could restrain her.

"Rachel, you must be calm — reasonable," said he, resolutely. "It was impossible for me to pursue a strange gentleman on your mere suspicion. Nor did I know whither he had gone. You cannot find your husband, but if he chooses, he can at any time find you. He knows not you are here. He may be at this moment employed in seeking *you*. In any case, it is no use fighting against destiny. You have done all you can — you must sit still and endure."

This was a strange homily to read to the poor creature at such a time; but Ninian knew the mind he had to deal with. There are some natures whom soothing only excites into worse suffering — their passions, lion-like, rage and roar, and can only be met by the cold, fixed control of one superior eye. In this manner Rachel was calmed.

"Endure — endure," she repeated, as if it were a new word he had taught her; and then was silent. At length, she uttered — quite broken-hearted — the longing, "Let me go home."

So Ninian, perhaps inwardly relieved, changed his intentions, and took her safe to Musselburgh.

"What must I do. Advise me what I must do?" said she, humbly, as he placed her in the care of faithful Jane Sedley. "I have seen my husband — I know I have — nothing could deceive a wife's eyes. Or, if you doubt me — see, this woman here — she will swear — ay, swear."

And Rachel shook Mrs. Sedley by the arm; then, crying out, "Ah! *she* can speak of him — *she* loved him!" — laid her head on the old woman's shoulder and wept.

Mr. Græme turned away — there was a deep manly compassion struggling in his heart. He thought of his fair darling — his little Hope — sleeping safe at home; and then of the poor creature, but a few years older, who had suffered such a world of anguish. He thought, if ever he were to see Hope suffer, and he not have the power to heal it, it would almost drive him mad.

Rachel came to him at last with a composed countenance. "I am not weeping now: I am ashamed that I

ever did weep; but I am so young still, and one cannot be brave always. After all, I think I ought to be glad of this day and yesterday — glad to know that my husband is safe and well, that he has my letter — that we shall soon meet — yes! I know we shall."

"I fervently hope so, Mrs. Sabine."

She smiled, even happily, as he addressed her by this name.

"You will soon always call me thus, but I shall nevertheless be the same Rachel you have so guided and befriended," said she, giving him her hand. "And now good-by, for a time. To-morrow, Jane and I go home together; I shall live in the cottage where my husband lived — where he will find me when he comes."

"That is right; it is just what I would have advised. God bless you and make you happy."

"And in my happiness I shall come to The Gowans, that my husband may know and thank Ninian Græme."

Ninian replied not, except by a kindly farewell. He could not tear down the sudden palace of hope her devoted affection had reared. But in his strong rectitude he felt an involuntary shrinking from a man who could act like Rachel's husband. As Jane Sedley opened the gate for him, he could not forbear entreating her never to forsake the young wife, so helpless and so much needing help.

"I'll do all that, sir, and gladly, for Mr. Geoffrey's wife," said the woman, and truth was in her honest face. "He was a gay, cheerful young gentleman, and I liked him, that I did! — And do, for all he passed me in the street yesterday — maybe he didn't mean it though.

He was thoughtless enough, but there was nothing bad in him."

"I hope not — I hope not, for that poor girl's sake!" said Ninian to himself, as he took his homeward way. Walking along through the quiet night, miles growing into nothing before his stout tread, the troublous scenes of the day gradually melted from him, or left only a sweet sense of his own security and peace.

Coming to his own home, seeing from the window the one faint ray which marked where little Hope slept, with his kind elder sister watching near, Ninian thanked God that in this sorrowful world he yet had left to him so much happiness — so many treasures.

CHAPTER IX.

Everybody knows the saying, "that the sky is clearest after a thunder-storm." And certainly, if we look back to those epochs of life, rare and few, when we can say, be it only of a week or a day, "Ay, I *was* happy!" we should chiefly find that they came immediately after times of great trouble; when we watched the grey skirts of the spent cloud slowly retiring; while around us the birds began to sing and the grass to grow, and we wakened up to life and its enjoyments like creatures newly born.

Ninian Græme had scarcely ever felt so happy as when he started with his two recovered invalids on their journey to the West country. It was a sweet autumn day; but two or three falling leaves drifted through the carriage-windows upon Hope's lap, as they passed through the avenue of the Gowans. Ninian, who sat opposite, screwing his long limbs into most eccentric convolutions in consequence of innumerable small packages — brushed them away.

"We must not have withered leaves falling on the child, must we, Lindsay? She is to begin life anew at the Clyde, as a thorough Scottish lassie."

Hope smiled, though with the listlessness of debility. Still, there was a faint colour in her cheek, — she made the loveliest invalid conceivable. Everybody looked at her and Ninian, as he half-led, half-supported her into the railway-carriage; and one or two young lady-travellers

smiled. This made his cheek burn, he scarcely considered why, except that he had a mortal objection to appear as a "ladies' man." But he would have done anything in the world for the comfort of little Hope.

Lindsay was not overlooked — he never did overlook Our Sister — but then she was strong now; at least as strong as she ever was, and quite able to take care of herself. Besides, her retiring nature always shrunk from being "made a fuss over;" so Hope received the benefit of all his care.

"I wish we may have the carriage to ourselves, and then the child" — Ninian seemed to take pleasure in calling her "the child" — "can recline all the way." And he looked very black at two intruders about to advance, until he saw that one of them was his friend Dr. Reay.

"So, Professor, you are running away from town likewise. Jump in here, then — friends are better company than strangers."

"Introduce me, Kenneth, my love," said the Professor's companion, a lady, plain and elderly, with that indefinable aspect known by the term of *vinegar*. Ninian quite started at hearing his old-bachelor friend thus addressed, until he remembered that the worthy man had lately encumbered his domicile with an unfortunate poor relation. And as "Kenneth my love," with a subdued air, muttered something about "My aunt, Miss Reay," Ninian guessed that this was the lady in question. He bowed, and then shook hands with Dr. Reay, in warmer fashion even than his wont.

"And what brings you westward, Professor?" asked Lindsay, when she too had "done the polite," though in a shy way; she had rather a dislike to meeting strangers.

"My aunt wished —" began Dr. Reay; but "my aunt" interrupted, and spoke for herself.

"It was not on my account, I assure you, my dear Kenneth. But, Miss Græme, he required change of air; he is always working in that horrid laboratory."

"Observatory, Aunt Barbara," mildly hinted the Professor.

"Well, observatory! I am sure I wonder he is alive. I, with my delicate health, could not endure this anxiety about him. So I advised him to go to the coast — with me, of course. A great sacrifice on my part, — very great, unequal as I am to exertion; but he could not do without some one to take care of him."

"Yet I have had no one to take care of me for twenty years," said the Professor, with something between a smile and a sigh.

"So much the worse — then it is time you had. And I am sure I quite devote myself to you, do I not, Kenneth, love? He will speak for himself, Mr. Græme."

Ninian assented, he was not quite clear to what; he had been placing a cushion at Hope's shoulders, and was only dimly conscious of his neighbourhood to the sole thing which he really hated in the world — "a woman with a tongue." Perhaps one of Hope Ansted's attractions in his eyes was her being a creature who had the blessed gift of silence.

"Well, Reay, is it not pleasant to break loose into the delicious country in this way! I don't think I ever enjoyed it more," said he, as he poked his head out to look at the grey Palace of Linlithgow. He then pointed it out to Hope, who said it was "very pretty," and lay watching it in passive pleasure, while Dr. Reay, taking

up the word, learnedly began to dilate on its antiquarian interests.

"There, Kenneth, that will do; don't fatigue yourself, or over-exert your poor brain, which was to have a complete holiday, you know," broke in the indefatigable Miss Reay. "Besides, Mr. Græme probably knows as much about the place as you do, and your talk will only weary that sweet, delicate-looking young lady, his sister."

"She is not my sister," explained Ninian, slightly confused. "This is Miss Hope Ansted, Miss Reay."

"I beg your pardon, I really imagined — But if I had only considered a moment, brothers rarely appear so very, very thoughtful and attentive. Your cousin, perhaps?"

"No, neither brother nor cousin," answered Hope, looking somewhat amused. "I wish he were either, indeed! But you would not say he was inattentive if you only saw Mr. Græme at home. There never was such a good brother as he!"

Ninian thanked her both in word and look. Yet somehow he was disappointed. He had thought she would have sat silent, instead of defending his cause so warmly, and he half-fancied the approbation of her eyes would have been sweeter than that of her tongue. Yet why should he regret, when she made no secret of her affection and esteem for him? Still, if she had not let it come out to that horrible woman, whom he heartily wished — in the next carriage! To escape, he turned to his friend, whom he now began to look upon as a martyr, and set him off on a discussion respecting the geological formation of the Campsie Hills, which were now becoming dimly visible.

Once wound up and set a-going, the worthy Pro-

fessor never stopped. His grey eye lighted up with intellect, his massive brows rose and fell — a habit he had when talking, which showed that the wrinkles there were the impress not of years, but intense thought. He was mounted on his hobby; and Kenneth Reay appeared then, and then only, a happy man. Ninian likewise, though he never talked much, was a pleased listener; but his ear occasionally wandered to the conversation on the opposite side, where sat Hope and Lindsay, with the Lady of the Tongue between.

"So, Mr. Græme has many brothers and sisters? No wife, I suppose?"

"How should he want one?" said Hope, smiling at the bare supposition. "His sisters all take care of him — even I help sometimes, don't I, Lindsay? We couldn't let him marry. Besides, he would never think of such a thing as falling in love! At his age, too!"

"Hope, my dear," said Lindsay, roused from the quiet silence into which she usually fell on any change from home, she who so rarely stirred abroad. "Take care not to over-exert yourself. Do you know you are talking almost as fast as Tinie?"

"Because I feel so glad, so merry. This seems like a journey into fairy-land to me, who never used to go anywhere. But," she added, watching her guardian's eye, tender, though serious, "perhaps I talk too much. Did I interrupt?"

"No, no! Be blithe and happy, my child," was Ninian's low answer, as he turned back to the Professor and geology, feeling rather painfully, that it was perhaps best suited to him, or he to it, "at his age." He *was* getting old.

But though he ceased to watch the child — fancying

he was almost a check upon her pleasure — he, nevertheless, heard every word that fell from her lips. Few they were, for her unwonted gaiety was soon suppressed by lingering feebleness. When they reached Glasgow, she appeared so much exhausted, that he proposed they should rest there for the night.

"No, no, I want to get to the journey's end. I want to see Tinie and the rest," she said, beseechingly. So they took her down to the Broomielaw, but she could hardly stand, and grew quite dizzy, poor litte thing, at the sight of the gangway by which she had to descend to the steamboat.

"Would you like me to carry you as I used to do?" asked Ninian, hesitating.

"Ah — yes!" She put her arms round his neck, and once more he held his little darling, his "wee birdie," safe in his breast. But she knew not how his manly heart throbbed — with tenderness infinite — with dawning passion — with a vague fear of things to come, that made him clasp her close as if to feel that now at least the child was his own — all this she knew not, nor ever knew.

He carried her to the stern of the boat, and made her a charming couch of plaids. There, when Miss Reay had vanished into the cabin to be seen no more, and the Professor, left to Miss Græme's universal kindliness, was labouring to inform her mind on as simple a subject as his own could furnish — viz., the geological and antiquarian history of Dumbarton Rock, — Ninian sat beside Hope Ansted, sometimes talking, sometimes idly watching the waves of the blue, broad Clyde, that each minute grew broader and bluer in their sight. They were neither of them inclined to be romantic —

and certainly there was nothing ultrapoetical in a Glasgow steamboat. Ninian sometimes pointed out the scenery opening on either shore with — "Is not that beautiful?" — and Hope, lifting up her weary head, tried to look pleased and admiring. As the evening shadows grew over the river, and the dim, purple light in the west showed him Hope's face, thin and wan, yet so peaceful, contented, and sweet, he began to feel as if there were nothing in the world but himself and this child, who had so crept into his circle of happiness, rounding it all, and making it as though it had never been complete before.

He did not quite understand his feelings. He was not sure that he loved — this tenderness was so different from any of his boyish fantasies and frenzies; but he felt as if he should like to sit as now, with Hope's hand in his, floating down the still river eternally, with the great hills looking on. Or else he longed to take the child in his arms once more, and go with her over those hills to some hidden paradise, where there were no such things as law-courts, law-papers, or worldly cares of any kind — where no one might enter but their two selves.

— He had forgotten all about his brothers and sisters! He had pictured a paradise which could only be shared between himself and — *his wife*. He had dreamed of things, possible and probable to all outward seeming, but which he in his strong, righteous heart, sternly fulfilling the vow he had made, knew to be utterly impossible!

With these thoughts, not clearly defined, indeed, yet still dimly rising in his brain, Ninian met his family.

The whole train — a goodly train, too — were gathered on the shore of the Gare-Loch. The twins, looking grave and matronly enough to justify the trust placed in them as guardians of the little troop, were there with a quiet welcome. Tinie danced about in her ancient fashion; Edmund, keeping close to Lindsay, seemed scarcely able to express his joy; while Reuben and Charlie, bounding hither and thither, shouting orders to boatmen, and contending over luggage, were still, as ever, the noisiest and most jubilant of all.

"Oh, how nice this is! — how cosy we are!" was all that Tinie could say, when the family were assembled in the parlour of their little cottage. It was a family group only — for Hope had been despatched at once to bed, by Lindsay's thoughtful care. Ninian wondered that no one seemed to miss her much — no one but he; however, he said nothing, except that when his sister reappeared, he asked "How the child seemed after her journey?"

"What makes you call her 'the child?' She is no more a child than I," remarked the pertinacious Tinie, settling herself as of old at her brother's knee.

Ninian laughed, pulled her hair, and inquired how long it was since his small pet had grown into an elderly woman? Then gathering his little flock in a circle round the fire — welcome enough that chill autumn night — he began to talk and to listen.

In a large family, especially one of unity and affection, individual feelings have less opportunity to be indulged or developed. They become merged in the great whole. If ever we hear of men or women, in whom one consuming passion, be it of ambition, fame, or love, eats away existence, we generally find them to

be those whom fate had set apart for a solitary life. The "family feeling" essentially modifies the egotism of individual emotion. Realities subvert vain dreams — habitual affection supplies the place of passion; and when the one overpowering love does come, it is guided and reined in by other sentiments, inferior, but still intense. The individual impelled to bow before the controlling power, does it in a Christian, dignified manner; not lying feebly down, Brahmin-fashion, before his idol's car, to be crushed into dust by a god of his own creation.

Thus Ninian Græme, when he saw himself once more among his own home circle, looked round on their young faces, listened to their mirth, the old familiar pleasures came over him — his vague dream vanished, at least for the time, and he felt only as the loving elder brother, cherished and revered — the Head of the Family.

"Certainly, as Tinie says, this is 'nice!'" exclaimed he, stretching himself in the arm-chair, which, as usual, had been assigned to him; "I declare I am glad we came on alone and left the Reays at Greenock, though the Professor seemed disappointed, poor fellow! Dreary enough was his former bachelor life, but I think he will find an aunt-ridden existence somewhat worse." And Ninian amused his brothers and sisters with an account of their journey, and a not over-flattering, but still good-natured sketch of Miss Reay.

"All women are disagreeable enough, but old maids are the most horrible creatures under the sun. To think that one of the species is coming to live beside us! — I shall start on a pedestrian tour, or bivouac far up in the Argyle Hills," said Reuben, indignantly.

"Or else go and live with Mr. Eneas MacCallum,

and I'll row across the Loch to see you every day. Somebody will like that, you know," said Tinie, with a mischievous twinkle in her bright eyes; to which Reuben politely responded with, "Don't be a fool," and the grave twins with a duet of "Oh, for shame!"

"Here's a little mystery," cried Ninian, much amused. "May I be allowed to inquire who is Mr. Eneas MacCallum?"

Thereupon arose a chorus of "I'll tell" — "No, let Tinie" — "'Tis all the boys' foolishness," &c. &c., which made Our Sister look quite uncomfortable. And in process of time came out the alarming fact that, despite the proprieties vigilantly maintained by the twins, the family had made an acquaintance, contemptuously christened as "Tinie's beau;" a stout, wealthy Glasgowegian, who pursued her and them with every conceivable attention, and against whom all the three brothers were up in arms.

"They lead me such a life, you can't tell," said Tinie, piteously. "Reuben lectures me all day over; and if we walk out, Edmund tucks me under his arm till my poor wrists ache with reaching up so high. Little Mr. Eneas would be a great deal more comfortable."

"Tinie! you are incorrigible," muttered Edmund, roused out of his dreaminess into a positive frown.

"I assure you, brother, it's no fault of mine," pursued the wilful damsel, looking absurdly demure. "I can't help people's admiring me, and Mr. MacCallum is a very nice little man; he has been most civil to all the boys; and even Esther confesses his mother to be a kind sort of a body. Besides, their house at Roseneath is beautiful."

"And you would greatly like both the house and the mother, wouldn't you now? together with that stupid, roly-poly, vulgar little fool?" cried the indignant Reuben.

"Come, come! that's rather too hard," interposed the elder brother, as he saw his pet's flushing cheek. It made him feel uncomfortable for a moment, lest there might be some truth at the bottom of the children's nonsense. To try it, he said, quietly glancing a meaning look across to Lindsay, who seemed in a state of most alarmed suspicion: "Well, I must see this grand hero, this conquering Eneas of Troy — that is, Glasgow. Of course, now I am come, he will direct all his attentions to me. But I will not interfere. Miss Tinie may please herself."

"Do you mean what you say, brother Ninian?" said Tinie, her merry little face becoming rather grave.

"Certainly."

"And would you actually let me go? Do you want to be rid of me? Would you really have me married?"

"If you wished it so very much!"

"And married to that fat, awkward lump of inanity?"

"'A very nice little man,'" you said.

"And send me to be smoked to death in that horrid Glasgow, among people who have no more brains in their heads than you or the Pro — or any of our friends at home have in their little fingers! I wonder you could ever think of such a thing, brother Ninian!" cried the little maiden, absolutely getting into a passion.

At which indignation the elder brother was rather pleased than otherwise; and as he calmed the diminutive

tempest he had raised, be felt that it would indeed be a most unpleasant thing to give away his pet sister to any body.

So the family sky being again clear, he began to enter into their various plans for the best spending of this little holiday. "It must now be brief to all," he said, candidly telling them how heavy this year's expenses had been upon his small income. "But though I myself must return in a few days, the rest shall stop as long as I can possibly manage it, for the sake of Lindsay's health, and that of Hope."

"Ah, poor little Hope, how kind you are to her, too; there is nobody like my brother — so generous — so self-denying," murmured the affectionate Tinie.

"*Generous — self-denying.*" The words jarred upon his honest spirit, as if there were in him something of deceit, which made him unwilling to meet his sister's eyes. He did not speak again of Hope Ansted.

But when the little party was dissolved, and he himself left to fulfil the unpoetical master-of-a-family duty of bolting all the doors, he stood a minute or two outside in the garden, meditating.

It was "a goodly night," a night that would bring instinctively to every thoughtful man the deepest feelings of his soul, awakening any secret hidden there, which the habit of daily life glosses over and presses down into insignificance. Ninian stood and looked at the broad dark Loch, with the stars overhead; at the wavy line of hills beyond, brightened by a dim auroral light. A sense of solitude, of unrest, oppressed him; with it, came a longing for some tie closer than that of kindred; some love which should be about him continually, engrossing both soul and sense, giving him

those emotions without which existence often declines into blank selfishness, making him acknowledge, as some wise man says: "That to be the husband of a wife and the father of a child, is to rise to a higher place as citizen of God's universe."

He thought how it would be, if instead of standing there by himself, he stood and felt arms twining round his neck, closer than Tinie's ever clung. Or if, climbing up to his stalwart breast and hiding there, were small winsome creatures — a baby-girl, nestling to her father with shy sweet eyes — or a sturdy boy, riding on knee and shoulder, blotting out from the young man's heart all its past griefs, broken dreams, or erring follies, and causing it to swell with a new pride — "This is *my son!*"

It was the first time Ninian had clearly thought of these things. He was not a youth wrestling with a vague love-dream; he was a man, to whom with all its bearings near and remote the passion came — or at least was coming; not madly or blindly, but with a force silent and deep as his own nature. All he had put from him — the ties of husband and father, the sweetest tenderness, the strongest pride a man can know — began to dawn upon him with a regret keen and sore, though formless still. Ere it took form, he felt that he must fly from it.

He turned his eyes from the sky, over which, cast by the yet unseen moon, was floating a light, soft and serene as a virtuous woman's love: he shut his ear to the ripple of the tide, rising among the stones of the beach with a sound like little children's laughter. He went in — bolted and barred the door even as he had closed the bars of his own heart — and so passed into his chamber.

CHAPTER X.

To sleep after seven A. M., when the shores of the lovely Gare-Loch were glowing in the brightest September morning that ever dawned, was certainly a deadly sin. Charlie and Reuben evidently considered it so, for they halloed incessantly at every one's door until the whole family were ready for breakfast. Soon afterwards, so early that it was almost incredible, appeared, coeval with the first boat — Professor Reay.

"And without his aunt! Oh dear, what a pity!" cried Tinie, as she ran through the garden, all bonnetless, to open the gate. At which condescension Dr. Kenneth looked an innocently happy man, though he found it quite impossible to express his delight in any way than by informing the inquisitive little fairy half-a-dozen times over, "that he was come to look for lodgings."

"He look for lodgings!" said she, publishing the fact, "why, he would not know a decent cottage from a Highland hut. He has no notion of anything in the world — he would be cheated on every side — he always is."

"I suppose so," said the learned man, with a half sigh, as he turned from the merry maiden's shower of banter to his friend Ninian, who stood looking at the beach, where the three boys were pulling up a cockle-shell of a boat. Therein Hope was to take her first "water airing," as her guardian had whimsically ex-

pressed it, when persuading her to the same. She came beside him, her cheek already rosier with the pure breezes from the Loch, watching the boys' movements in undisguised delight. Ninian cast one look on the beautiful face; his own grew troubled — he walked to the other window, and resolutely tried to compose his mind sufficiently to argue with the Professor concerning the tidal peculiarities of the Firth of Clyde, and at what period of pre-Adamite history the Gare-Loch, Holy-Loch, Loch-Long, &c., were likely to have been formed.

"I never knew such an atrocious waste of time," cried Reuben, entering with a dignified rebuke. "Edmund and I have been sitting half an hour on the edge of the boat, and the girls won't come. Who is ready, and who isn't? or else we will shove off and leave you all!"

On which summons there arose a division in the family, as to who was to go with Hope, and who was to wait until the Professor and Miss Græme returned from their cruise after lodgings. Ninian was, as usual, the ruling arbiter.

"The Twins are the steadiest of you all — let them take care of Hope. Reuben and Edmund will row."

"And not you?" said Hope, timidly. "I thought you would go too."

"No, my dear, I have letters to write," he answered. No one ever opposed Ninian when he spoke in that peculiar, resolved way; so Hope patiently turned to the Twins, and took hold of Ruth's arm; but she walked feebly, and coming to the rough beach, Ninian saw her pause, evidently quite alarmed at the prospect before her.

"Those careless boys! they forget the child has been

ill;" muttered he, as he went down to the shore, and helped her across the sand and sea-weed into the boat. Hope clung to his hand.

"I wish — I wish you were going! I never was in a thing like this before, and I feel half-frightened," she whispered, looking across the broad water, as if it were an abyss of horror impossible to pass.

"You foolish English lassie," said Mr. Græme, smiling, "we must teach you better. You will soon get accustomed to our Lochs. Indeed you are quite safe; the boys are good rowers, and very careful." — A fact slightly controverted by their being at this moment struggling who should get a particular oar, until Edmund was tilted out of the boat, nearly capsizing it, and getting wet up to the knees besides.

"Nay, boys, this will never do," said the elder brother, as Ruth and Esther began loudly to complain, and entreat him not to leave them. Hope seemed too frightened to speak, but she looked up imploringly to Ninian, whose arm she had instinctively clasped. He paused a moment, and then took his seat beside her.

A push or two from Edmund's oar, as the boy stood up, displaying somewhat proudly his graceful figure, now growing muscular and strong, — and off flew the little craft. Certainly the poets are right when in their descriptions of Paradise, or any paradisiacal sphere of being, they invariably contrive to introduce a boat. Tasso, in his voyage of the Two Knights — Dante, in his vision of the Angel-guided bark — Shelley, in his Revolt of Islam, where the "spirit-winged boat" bears Laon and Cythna to the land of immortality, — do but slightly idealise upon a reality as near approaching the Elysian existence as we stupid mortals can conceive.

"Well, brother, is not this delicious?" cried Edmund, as he paused to dip his bared arms in the water, shaking back his curly hair, and showing his brown face — no longer pale and poetical-looking, but ruddy with all the health of early youth.

Ninian assented, with an admiring glance at his brother, and thinking in his own mind that Lindsay was right when she declared her boy to be the bonniest laddie that ever was seen. Reuben, labouring vigorously and merrily at his oar; Esther, sitting in rather grave solitude at the bow; and little Hope, resting at the bottom of the boat, with her head on Ruth's lap, made up a freight of perfect happiness.

Half closing his eyes, Ninian sat listening to the lapping of the water at the keel, which Edmund, much to his younger brother's scorn, declared was exactly like the sound of a kiss — a mermaid's kiss, of course. The boat appeared literally to float in sunshine — so glittering were the waves of the Loch — so intensely bright was the sky. Even the mountains seemed asleep; scarcely one cloud-shadow glided over them. The oars fell into the water with an even, monotonous, lulling sound; everything else was quite still. Ninian gave himself up to a dreamy kind of delight — there seemed over him a sort of golden haze through which all his life's realities, bitter and sweet, were seen afar off like shadows. Only once, when a passing breeze blew one of Hope's long curls across his knee, and without thinking, he began to twist it round his fingers, he was conscious of a feeling which many of us have at a time when our cup of happiness is full — so full that we dread lest the next breath may dash it from our lips. He thought, if that same hour — that same moment — with the sky

so sunny, and the waves so clear — the boat could go down — down, swift as lightning, only giving him time to take the child in his arms, that in death he might hold her there, sleeping safe at the bottom of the blue Clyde, — perhaps such an ending would be the best thing he could wish for.

He was roused by a slight cry from Esther, and the near threatening of the very calamity he had been contemplating — occasioned by Reuben's eagerness after the pursuit of marine zoology.

"I've got it — I've got it," he cried, nearly lurching the boat over to stretch his oar towards a beautiful Medusa. But the fairy thing went floating by — Happiness herself is not harder to catch than a live Medusa! However, the attempt produced great fun, and much laughing over Hope's ignorance; she had never even heard of such an animal. Consequently, Ninian, in his desire to inform her mind, held her round the waist, while she leaned over the boat's side, dipping her hand in up to the very elbow, with a vague notion that she should thereby catch something. And her laughter was so blithe, so thoroughly infantile in its joyance — that Ninian thought what a simpleton he had been, to dream such dreams, and make such stern resolves concerning a mere child! He was a grown man, old enough to be — not exactly her father — but something very like it; she was his pet — his darling; he might still keep her as such, and be happy, without blame.

So he cast off the silence which had hung over him, and began to amuse the rest, which Our Brother so well knew how to do. And as their laughter — even Hope's, rang over the sunny river, he thought that after all to

enjoy life on the surface of the Clyde, was better than sleeping ever so sweetly in death at the bottom.

Their sail was not intended to be long, for over them hung the grim shadow of Miss Reay, who was to appear soon after noon. "We must be at home then," observed the conscientious Esther, and Ninian agreed thereto, though he felt as if he could gladly have sailed on to eternity down the beautiful Clyde. This being impossible, he steered the wee boat round by Roseneath Bay, remarking to Hope, that "that was the place where Jeanie Deans landed, the land of MacCallum More."

"Oh, I know all about the gentleman. Tinie told me the whole story of him and his house, and his mother, before we went to sleep last night."

"She means that hateful Eneas, little stupid as she is!" cried Reuben, who was not more polite to Hope than he was to his sisters. "And lo! 'Speak of the deil,' &c. Mr. MacCallum's there!"

Ay, so he was, wading up to his little fat knees along the beach, and vociferating with all his might.

"Crouch down, Hope, he'll fancy you are Tinie. Oh, how vexed he will be," wickedly cried Edmund, who, in making common cause against the would-be intruder into the family, condescended to be more common-place and unpoetical than had ever been known before.

But the elder brother put his veto on any tricks of the sort; perhaps from a sort of tender-heartedness towards the harmless little man, whose good-tempered face became clouded the moment he neared the boat and missed his ladye-love. He was certainly honest in his adoration, and Ninian, being quite sure of its hopeless nature, could afford a little benevolent pity. So Mac Callum More — as, in memory of Hope's blunder, he

was henceforth ironically christened — was taken into the wee boat, and safely landed in the presence of his idol.

Tinie was indeed a complete magnet to the other sex; they seemed to follow her everywhere. She appeared at the landing-place, attended not only by the poor faithful Professor, but by another gentleman, the very opposite of Kenneth Reay in outward seeming.

"Mr. Ulverston, you see! He has just landed at the cottage, and waited for your return," said she, with a somewhat shy look at her brothers, and a malicious one at that unfortunate Eneas, whose smiling face grew dark the minute he saw her hanging on a stranger's arm, and making herself quite at home there.

"Who is Mr. Ulverston?" whispered Reuben, already beginning to frown. "A friend of yours, Hope?"

Hope turned languidly round, but meeting Mr. Ulverston's gaze — the sort of gaze he always directed at pretty girls — she blushed deeply.

"Your two sisters, Mr. Græme, of course? The likeness is sufficient," said he, bowing to the twins. "This lady I think I have seen before — I cannot exactly tell where."

"Mr. Ulverston — Miss Ansted," was Ninian's brief introduction, without any explanation. But he saw Hope's blush, and heard her whisper to Tinie something about the "railway station." She had not forgotten that incident, apparently. Involuntarily he looked at Mr. Ulverston, who was busy making acquaintance with the boys — his gay winning face, his manner — *empressé*, yet not forward — his speech and mien so unmistakably that of a gentleman! Somehow, when Ninian saw his

sisters and Hope smiling together, he wished he had not given so warm an invitation to Mr. Ulverston.

But the latter seemed determined to make himself agreeable. He helped to drag the boat ashore, thereby ruining his delicate kid gloves for evermore; and then began joking with Tinie, who evidently was bent on monopolising the attentions he appeared quite willing to give. Leaving the beach, he offered one arm to her and another to Ruth; they went on laughing together, while Esther slowly followed with Hope.

"I remember Miss Ansted," was his sole remark concerning the latter. "Why did you not say you knew her, Græme?"

Ninian made no reply to this communication — made carelessly, in the intervals of playing the agreeable to all the Miss Græmes in succession; a position of universal admirer which no one seemed more calculated to fill than the young stranger. Which attentions, spread so extensively among the whole family, reassured the elder brother, who began to catch the infection of Mr. Ulverston's gaiety.

"I don't know how I shall find house-room for you all," said he, smiling, when, added to the party there came Lindsay and Miss Reay. "You can never all dine in this wee parlour; suppose we seize our provisions — journey away, and make an encampment among the mountains?"

"Or," cried the boys, who seemed to have grown terribly aquatic in their propensities, "let us take to the boats; we can get two, and sail away round the foot of the Loch to Ardmore, dine there, and come home by starlight."

"Delicious!" responded Mr. Ulverston, on behalf of

the whole; looking round as if quite satisfied that his pleasure would be found the ruling pleasure. Everybody echoed him but Hope, who looked doubtingly to Ninian.

"Are you afraid? — will it tire you?" said he, going up to her. Somehow, in the presence of a man of the world like Ulverston, he could not say, as usual, "my child."

"Oh! we will take the greatest care of Miss Ansted. She must not refuse, indeed she must not," pursued Mr. Ulverston, following him. "So

'Come o'er the sea,
Maiden with me,'

as my great countryman says."

"Your countryman! I thought you were English," said Ninian.

"I was brought up in England, but — my father was an Irishman," he answered, hesitating, as if he were rather ashamed either of the country or the paternity.

"Yet Ulverston is an English name," broke in Miss Reay, utterly unable longer to hold her tongue. "When I was in England," — the grand Hegira of her existence, it seemed — "when I was in England, I heard it more than once. There were the Ulverstons of Devonshire — respectable, very — but poor: the young Miss Ulverstons of Cheltenham — Sir Peter Ulverston of Hartland Hall. May I ask to which of these families you belong?"

"To all and any of them, madam," was his answer, smoothing his slight frown into a bow and smile of great suavity, which made Miss Reay confess privately, "he was the nicest young man she had ever seen."

He followed up his attentions by handing her into the boat, and making double use of her — converting her plaid into a comfortable cushion for himself — and leading her into such a flood of reminiscences of her English life, that no further opportunity occurred for remarks on his own family or nation.

In the other boat, the wee one, Ninian rowed a quiet freight — his eldest sister, the Professor, and Hope. None of the party talked much. Hope lay — her lips parted in silent pleasure — looking sweet and fair. Her slight "young ladyisms," her little follies, only appeared in Tinie's company; with her guardian she was always quiet, gentle, grave.

There was a general gathering on the beach of Ardmore. Such fun — such laughter — such scrambling among the slippery rocks and beds of dulse; Mr. Ulverston and his wondrous politeness being in constant requisition to aid unwary footsteps. He was the life of the whole party, with his unfailing gaiety — his brilliant talk — nay, even his songs — for he turned out to be one of the few singing-men who can give a pathetic song without appearing sentimental, or a comic ditty without making buffoons of themselves. And while singing, there suddenly came over him a cloud of such heavy gloom, that it awoke the compassion of the only one of the girls who did not seem fascinated by him — Hope Ansted.

"I don't think that man is quite as happy as he seems. I feel almost sorry for him," said she to Lindsay.

"It is the Irish nature — cloud and sunshine — gaiety and gloom," answered Ninian, who always happened to be holding close watch over his late invalids;

while the rest of the party disported themselves as they chose. "You will see; he will be merry again in a minute."

And so he was; yet with occasional relapses into the pensive melancholy which interests all tender-hearted young girls to a marvellous extent, until they find how much nobler is that brave manliness which baffles fate, and shows to the world a quiet aspect, unmoved and serene, whatever lies beneath. So, now and then, Hope's gentle eyes wandered in the direction of Mr. Ulverston, and her beauty, softened by a feeling of pity, appeared more interesting even to him. More than once, he stopped in the middle of a shower of witticisms to move nearer to her, and converse in a serious tone, as if, with his quick tact, he saw at once that the pathetic side of his character was the one more likely to harmonise with hers.

"Here is a Robinson Crusoe picture — a colony in the desert. Will you go with me and see it, Miss Ansted?" said he, bounding back from a little journey of discovery he had been making among the rocks, in company with the more adventurous of the party. "It is the oddest place — a little hut built of mats and dried sea-weed — and in it there is a withered anatomy of an old woman, and such a pretty fairy of a child! It is just like a Highland edition of Sycorax and Ariel. Do come."

Hope looked involuntarily at her guardian; he smiled permission, and she went away, Mr. Græme and Lindsay following.

"Is it not charmingly picturesque?" Ninian heard Mr. Ulverston say to Hope. "Look into the hut; — quite a Rembrandt effect — that red firelight, with the

old woman crouching down among the smoke. My infant Ariel, too, how very pretty, is she not? I do adore beauty in all ranks of life!"

Hope drooped her head, smiling, as if with some dawning consciousness that this last sentence included her, or was meant to do so.

"They do not seem very miserable either, do they, Miss Ansted? One might make a little Paradise out of such a lovely solitude as Ardmore. I had once dreams of love in a desert myself."

"Then I suppose you would fall in love with that Highland beauty if she were only a little older," said Ninian, somewhat amused. "Mr. Ulverston and the grand-daughter of a poor dulse-gatherer — for I know the good woman of old. It would be a comical *mésalliance*."

"*Mésalliance!*" repeated he, as the quick blood rushed angrily to his brow. "I trust you do not imagine me capable of such folly. That would be an insult indeed.'"

"Nay, Mr. Græme was only jesting," interposed Hope, timidly, as she looked from Ninian to Mr. Ulverston, who was still chafing under what seemed a degree of annoyance quite unaccountable. Her eyes rested on the latter, perhaps with a womanly leaning toward the one whom she thought was wronged. She touched his arm, saying gently, "Do not be vexed at Mr. Græme; we never mind his jesting speeches — never. He always means kindly."

"Thank you," said Ninian, in a slow voice which expressed pain, but so slightly, that Hope perceived it not, nor turned as usual to lift up her face of innocent conciliation. And though immediately afterwards she

came to his side, talking in her old affectionate way; still for hours after Ninian was haunted by the image of the young creature he so cherished — as seen in that momentary gesture of hers, gliding from him and towards another. It was the first warning of what he should feel, did that happen, which he had hitherto not dared to conjure up in his lightest thought.

However, he thanked God, — ay, his feeling was so earnest that he positively caught himself saying in his heart that solemn thanksgiving — there was no likelihood of such a thing at present. Mr. Ulverston, after his momentary admiration — and he had looked with intense admiration at the earnest face of the young girl who was so anxious to soothe his ruffled feelings — flitted back to Tinie, who was, though not the prettiest, much the most agreeable and amusing. At which preference the wicked little maiden was filled with coquettish pride; so as to brave the piteous looks of MacCallum More, the scornful glances of her three brothers, and, last of all, the quiet retiring of Kenneth Reay. He, with a patient countenance, stole away, and was discovered at last sitting on the beach, his long legs half covered by the advancing tide, hammering pensively away at a submarine rock of curious formation.

Sweet and still sank the early September eve, with its long rich twilight. The woods of Roseneath grew black, and the Argyle mountains dim; while far down the broad estuary of the Clyde glowed the sunset, changing the dim river into hues of lilac and rose.

"Why, brother, you are growing 'sentimental!'" cried Tinie, as Ninian stood beside the rocky ledge where with plaids and cloaks he had fashioned a comfortable resting-place for Lindsay and Hope. He stood on the

rocky point, his tall figure clearly defined against the sky, his arms folded, the low sunset shining on his face, which had changed much that day, but which now wore a calm and holy expression. He was thinking, as earnest and rather grave minds like his are prone to think in such a scene and time, of the two great truths, the only truths of life — Love and Eternity.

Such a deep serenity was over him, that he only smiled when Tinie called him "sentimental." "Well, my 'wee thing,' even you yourself look somewhat subdued this lovely evening. And did I not see Mr. Ulverston take out of his P — coat pocket a book, which looked marvellously like a volume of poems?"

Mr. Ulverston pleaded guilty, and flourished Tennyson threateningly before the eyes of the little party.

"We are all tired of scrambling; let us sit down and read. There is quite light enough, for I know Tennyson almost by heart," said he. Hearing which, Edmund, greatly mollified, looked up at the young man, observing *sotto voce* to Hope, "that he was not such a puppy after all."

"I never thought him one," said Hope, quietly, as she turned and listened to the reading. It chanced to be, by some one's request — "The Lord of Burleigh." Ulverston read well, and seemed rather proud of his reading. There was some strong feeling, too, underneath, indicated both in his voice and countenance — at least, so thought Ninian and Hope, the only two who watched him closely. When he reached the verse —

> "And a gentle consort made he,
> And her gentle mind was such,
> That she grew a noble lady,
> And the people loved her much,"

he shut the book, saying, impatiently:

"Really, I think this is the only piece of twaddle our friend Alfred ever wrote. I can't read poetry I don't like — I am reading horribly now. Who will finish it for me?"

"I," cried Edmund, gladly; "I know it by heart. It was one of the poems she liked best of any."

"She! Ha, ha, Master Edmund!"

"A friend of mine — of us all," said the boy, colouring. But somehow Mr. Ulverston's half-sarcastic laugh made him ashamed to mention the name of Rachel Armstrong. He took the book and finished the poem, after which they all began to discourse thereon.

"It is a true story, people say. I wonder if the Lady of Burleigh were really so sweet a creature, and so much beloved," said Hope, just venturing to speak, in answer to the deferential kindness with which Mr. Ulverston requested her opinion.

"I believe her portrait is still in some noble hall or other; I forget where," Ninian replied. "The only thing I recollect is, that her real name was Sarah Hoggins. I have no faith in the happiness of such unequal unions; they generally begin in mere headlong passion, and end in wrong or in sorrow." And he looked grave, remembering a story which he alone knew.

"What do you think on the subject, Mr. Ulverston?" said Edmund, addressing him. He stood stamping the air-globules of sea-weed till they went off, one after the other, in small volleys of sound; idle baby-play, were it not for the fierce, restless manner in which he devoted him to the occupation, as if for the mere desire of crushing something.

"What do I think? I think Lord Burleigh was a fool! He might have admired the village beauty, many

a simple youth does that. He might even have amused himself with a harmless flirtation — great honour, too, for her. But to marry her; to take a common clod and set it beside him in his ancestors' halls. Faugh! I say he was a fool."

"A fool, perhaps, but at least an honest, honourable man," said Ninian; and his grave eye confronted Mr. Ulverston, whose angry manner changed immediately. He seemed, chameleon-like, ever to take the hue of his neigbour's mind.

"Of course — of course. Nay, we are getting too serious on this matter. I declare I am speaking as if there were rising up indignantly within me, 'all the blood of the Howards.' But," he added, with an air of smiling frankness, "to explain my hastiness in this matter, I ought to confess that I have a friend, who once got into an unfortunate entanglement of this kind. But he shall get out of it — he shall, by Heaven! A man cannot sacrifice his whole life to one youthful folly. You, Mr. Græme, as a man of common sense, knowing the world, would you not say the same?"

"Not being acquainted with the circumstances, it is impossible for me to decide," was Ninian's somewhat cold answer, which fell like ice on fire upon the impetuous, variable temper of the young man.

"I believe it is scarcely necessary you should decide," said Mr. Ulverston proudly; and either moved apart — two discordant natures, which no power on earth could ever harmonise.

Ninian might have noticed him more, or perhaps given out more of his own upright mind in this matter, but that the hush of the lovely evening was upon his feelings. Sitting there, with the quiet river beyond,

and beside him Hope's soft profile, drooping, delicate, and womanly, or else growing into almost spiritual beauty as it was uplifted in the twilight, he could not keep up the jarring of the outside world. No romantic ecstasies were indicated in his look or manner; in fact, he scarcely said a word, except a pleasant response now and then to Tinie's fantastic humours. But he sat quietly happy, listening to "the children's" chatter, or to one or two poems which Edmund would persist in asking Mr. Ulverston to read, until the light failed.

"We must indeed go home now," said the elder brother, rousing himself at last, and beginning to collect the little stragglers of the party, especially Miss Reay, who, in considerable ill-humour, was found sitting over the dulse-gatherer's fire — and the poor Professor, of whom, for a long time, the report had been *non est inventus*.

"Our brother has such a keen sense of duty in small things," laughed Tinie. "He thinks we ought to go home, so go home we must. What say you, Mr. Ulverston?"

"*Je ne vois pas la nécessité*, as the French Queen answered, when they told her that poor people must live. Duty is all very well, but I never do anything unpleasant if I can help it. And when this move of your brother's will result in my being left on Helensburgh pier, to find my way onwards by to-morrow's steamer, and leave all this fair company — really, Miss Christina, you will excuse my saying, that it *is* unpleasant."

And he looked so disappointed, that Hope, despite her evident weariness, tried to plead for a longer stay; fearful lest they might be going home on her account.

"You never think of yourself, my love — it is well you have Ninian and me to think for you. We must really go, Mr. Ulverston," was Miss Graeme's decisive answer.

"Then it seems a pity that I should detain you to go round the pier; I can easily walk along the shore to Helensburgh," said he; and, without allowing any one to oppose him, he quickly made his adieu to all except the boys and Ninian, who were down at the boats. Almost before the rest were aware of his intentions, he was seen disappearing along the beach.

"Poor young man — he is a somewhat hasty temper, I fear. I am sure I did not mean to offend him," observed Lindsay, regretfully.

"He is a great simpleton to take it as such," Tinie cried. "And Hope there looks as sorry for him as if he were a much-injured individual. Why, child, your compassion extends from an ill-used cat to a young gentleman in a bad humour. Never was there such a soft-hearted little thing."

"I don't like to see anybody uncomfortable," was Hope's meek reply, so meek, that even Tinie could not tease her any more. And as Ninian, when he heard the story of Mr. Ulverston's flight, only said, "Oh, indeed! I will call on him at Helensburgh early to-morrow," the subject soon died away.

Ere the little convoy started, it was already dusk; the stars were coming out, and from the opposite shores of the river the lights of Greenock and Helensburgh twinkled in fairy rows. All the river between grew black — a desolate abyss, awful to traverse — at least so the timid Hope seemed to think, as she drew closer to her guardian, to whom she instinctively looked in all

danger. And Ninian, putting his arm round the child, laughed at her fears, showing her the beautiful line of gold which yet barred the west, lying across the dim reach of the river. Then he pointed out the phosphorescent light made by the oars in the water — silvery showers, which Edmund declared fell exactly like the waving of a mermaid's hair — "the same mermaid that was in the habit of kissing the keel" — as Reuben maliciously added. Whereupon the young philosopher held forth learnedly on the causes of the phosphorescence seen in particular rivers or seas, until he found that nobody was listening; so, with a contemptuous grunt, he stopped.

Afterwards they all grew quiet and grave, even the singing from the other boat became fainter, or sank into a soft "Ave Maria," or the beautiful hymn, "O Sanctissima." Night on the wide open river, with the stars overhead, and the darkening waters below — in such a scene even the gayest spirit might well take a solemn tinge. And Ninian, still holding the child, until she ceased to tremble, and sat looking upward with a new awe on her innocent face, felt his soul stirred within him. He said few words, but those few were graver and more earnest than he had ever spoken before in Hope's hearing. He spoke less as to the child than to the woman — of serious things, of this life, its duties, its sorrows, and of the life to come.

"I like to hear you," said Hope, with deep affection in her reverent eyes. "I think I should be always good if you took care of me."

A throb came, great and strong, almost rending his heart as it arose — a longing to stand alone under those stars, with Hope clasped close to his breast, vowing

to her and before God, that nothing should ever part her from his care. And his resistance of both — ay, even in thought, gave Ninian the first warning pang of all he had to suffer — nay, perhaps all he had to forego.

He answered in his calm, kind voice, "Do you think so, my child?" Soon afterwards he let his arm drop from round her, though so gently that she never felt the loss. He talked awhile with his younger brothers, then took the oars from them, and dashed the boat along with fierce sinewy strokes, as if he were sweeping against an ocean of fate — hopeless, yet struggling with unconquerable will. No clear thoughts had he either of past, present, or future — his mind was in a whirl. When at last they reached the shore, he sent his sister and Hope quickly homeward, himself lingering behind to see that the boat was safe, and to wait for the other merry crew, whose voices came faintly over the water. There was still a brightness in the west, for a September sunset is so long in dying; but elsewhere mountains, river, and sky were in heavy shadow.

With a sadder feeling than the mere closing of a happy day — though even that is always sad — Ninian stood alone on the shore of the Gare-Loch, idly counting over the hours of holiday pleasure, which in his life had been so few — the bright morning, the still, sunny afternoon, the evening so serenely fair. Now the day had come to an end, as all things must. There floated in his brain, as a sort of dirge over its brief happiness, the burden of a poem Edmund had read at Ardmore

> — "And the reapers reaped,
> And the sun fell, and all the land was dark,"

CHAPTER XI.

"TINIE, I have something to say to you. Will you come and walk with me down the shore?" said Ninian one morning. He had sat very grave all breakfast-time, reading his letters, or meditating in silence. Tinie looked almost alarmed at the "something," except that her brother never scolded, and rarely lectured, save in the gentlest way. So she put on a brave face, took his arm, and walked with him, chattering merrily in her usual way, at least for some time.

"Christina, is it possible for you to be serious for five minutes?"

She knew he was in earnest now, for it was not once in six months that he called her *Christina*. "Are you angry with me, brother?"

"No, not angry, but somewhat grave. I have received this letter, which I think you ought to read. Do so now, and then we can speak about it."

"'Tis from Eneas — the valiant Eneas! I have already had a score of his precious compositions," said she, her mirth again rising.

"I did not know that — but read this one."

She did so, at first laughing, then gradually becoming grave. Ninian was not surprised; he himself had been greatly touched by the honest little lover's plain statement of his feelings — by the humility with which he spoke of his worldly advantages, and the manly earnest-

ness of his appeal to Tinie's brother for the hand of his wayward ladye-love.

"Well?" said Ninian, as his sister returned the letter, and hung her head in silence.

"Yes, brother."

"Are you in earnest about this matter? I can scarcely believe it, and yet if, as he says, you have received his letters, accepted his attentions, given him no denial in any way — is that all true, Tinie?"

She made no answer.

"Must I suppose it true, then?" said Ninian, stung with a doubt that made him scarcely bear to look on his pet sister. "You cannot really love Mr. MacCallum — you ridicule him too much. Is it to him, or to his wealth, that I am to give my sister away?"

"Brother!" She tore her arm from him, and stamped the sand with her little foot. "I wouldn't marry that man if he were as rich as Crœsus."

"Why then did you lead him to suppose you would? Think of his letter — humble indeed — so humble it almost grieved me; yet he evidently believes that though he does not deserve you, he will win you at last. Why did you allow this?"

"Because — because — we were all so dull here, and he amused me."

"He amused you! And you have gone on wounding the heart of an honest man for 'amusement.' I know girls do that sometimes, still I did not believe it of my sister."

Tinie kept silence, tossing her proud little head once or twice, and struggling not to cry, or rather not to be seen crying.

"How long has this been going on? I mean — not

in jest, as I thought it was when I came here a fortnight ago, but in earnest, as it was on one side, at least. I wish — I wish that I had seen it before!"

"You might have seen it," said Tinie, half sulkily. "I never made any secrets about Mr. MacCallum and his visits, only ever since Lindsay and Hope have been ill, you have been too busy over them to mind me."

Ninian drew back, conscience-stung.

"Not that I am so ill-natured as to grumble at your taking such care of them," continued Tinie. "Nobody could be too kind to Our Sister; and you can't help liking Hope any more than we can, she is such a sweet little thing, a great deal more amiable than I. Besides, as Miss Reay says, she is so fond of you, and makes such a fuss over you."

Ninian turned his face to the Loch, over which the morning sun glittered and flashed. But it was not that which blinded him, and made him feel as if everything were reeling to and fro. Only for a moment; — the next he answered — as he must answer, as he would have answered, though the words had choked him, —

"I am glad to hear that; we should all try to be kind to a girl so desolate. In her sad position, and remembering what her father is, I trust I shall always do my duty by her. However, I was not talking of Hope Ansted, but of you."

He said this, and no more, for with the effort even his strong heart failed. Tinie, ashamed of her momentary ill-feeling, answered nothing, so that the brother and sister walked on in perfect silence. In one, at least, heaven only knew all which that silence concealed!

At last Ninian spoke. "And what am I to say to Mr. Mac Callum?"

"Say? Nothing! Or just tell him that I never meant anything but fun, and I couldn't think of marrying him — a comical, fat, little goose of a man. I wonder he could ever fancy such nonsense!" replied Tinie, whose light spirits revived in a brief space of time. Strangely, bitterly, they jarred upon her brother.

"Child," said he, "you have done a wrong thing. In this matter my heart goes more with that poor man than it does with you. If, instead of your thoughtless message, I told Mr. Mac Callum you were not worthy this sincere attachment of his, it would be nearer the truth."

"Tell him so, then — little I care!"

"No, I will not tell him. But I will write at once, as he entreats me — and something in his perseverance touches me, so that I shall do it more warmly than I would have done a week ago, when I thought he was a mere wealthy simpleton, beneath the least notice of my sister."

"And you think him not beneath my notice now?"

"No; because he offers you an honest heart, which, though refusing, no woman ought contemptuously to spurn. Child! you are young; you don't know the world, or the men in it — how lightly they love, how continually they play and trifle with girls' hearts — especially such gay, sparkling creatures as you, — and never say frankly, as Mr. Mac Callum does, 'I love you — be my wife, and I will try to make you happy.' And if I must explain all — mind, I do it, not thinking of my own feelings in the matter, but simply fulfilling my duty towards this honest man, who has left his cause in my hands — I ought to tell you, Christina, that as the world goes, this would be deemed no

unworthy offer for a girl entirely without fortune, between whom and poverty hangs only one life — mine. I say this, because I wish to lay all sides of the case before you, that at no after-time you may repent of your decision."

This was a long, grave speech — the first of the kind that Tinie had ever heard from Ninian. She looked up a moment to see if he were in earnest — he was, indeed; she even felt frightened at the stern lines of his face.

"Would you be glad, then, if I married Eneas Mac Callum?" she asked.

"I never said that."

"No, but you implied it. I see how it is — Miss Reay was right in what she told me — I believe it all now," cried Tinie, the angry tears rising to her eyes.

"You believe what? Nay, answer — I must know!" said Ninian, firmly, though his face flushed.

"That some of these days you would long to be rid of us. That we — the twins and myself — ought to make haste and get husbands, ere we found we had no home in our brother's house."

"And you believed this? Go on — tell me all she said."

"All! as if that were not enough! No, thank goodness! I have not yet seen my sister-in-law. I did not suppose that you would marry a mad woman like Mrs. Armstrong, or a mere baby like Hope Ansted, or —"

"Or Miss Reay herself," added Ninian, trying to smile. "Tinie might imagine even that, when once

she takes into her head such unjust thoughts of her brother."

He was indeed one worthy the name of man, who could speak so calmly, with a voice that never betrayed one trace of the struggle beneath — the passion, the self-reproach, the love warring against other love, and the stern, iron hand of duty laid over all.

"Were they unjust? Oh, say over again that they were unjust? You couldn't do it, Ninian; you couldn't turn away your poor little pet, and marry her to any stupid fool that asks her — no, not even that you might take a wife yourself? Never mind what Miss Reay said — the wretch! If I had really believed it, it would have broken my heart."

So exclaimed the little creature, pouring out her feelings amidst a shower of tears, trying to draw Ninian's hands to her, and wondering that he stood so grave, so cold, so unlike himself, though without a shadow of unkindness or anger.

"You will forgive me now? I would not grieve you for a moment, my own brother! — we all know what an angel of a brother you are. You will never think of marrying when we love you so much? That was what I said to Miss Reay. Tell me, only tell me, that it is so? You will never go and love some stranger, and leave your sisters alone in the wide world?"

He turned his face upward — it was very white — or else the sunshine made it seem so. He said, "God is my witness, I never will!"

Then he sat down on a stone, and let his little sister creep to him, clasping him round the neck, laughing and crying at once, breaking off at times to murmur, "Oh, forgive me!" "Oh, don't let my naughty words grieve

you!" "Ninian — brother Ninian — you are quite sure you love me better than you love any one?"

"What — not satisfied yet?" And he tried to look at her with his old smile, and caress her in his old affectionate way, but could not. "God forgive me!" he muttered, and once more turned his face up to the broad sky, that wore to him a brightness like marble, as dazzling and as hard. He was thankful that Tinie's tears blinded her, so that she did not see her brother.

"Yes, indeed, I am quite satisfied! I will never grieve you any more — never! Say that you are not grieved now — at least, not very much?"

"Oh no — oh no." He patted her hands, which held him so closely; and then as he rose up their clasp dissolved of itself. "We must walk on now, Tinie — at all events, I must. I think" — he faltered, as if for the first time his heart recoiled at the necessary hypocrisy — "I think you will be tired if you go further — nor shall I like you to return alone."

"I am not tired in the least, and I would like to walk with you all the way to Helensburgh."

"It will not do," said Ninian, with a faint smile. "I have business. I must send my wee sister back, now that we have talked over all we had to speak about."

Tinie looked ashamed. She waited a minute for him to recur to the subject of their earlier conversation; but he did not. He walked along mechanically as if oblivious of everything. She said at length, timidly:

"Brother, I know how wrong I have been about that letter. Will you tell me what I must do — or will you tell Mr. Mac Callum yourself?"

"Tell Mr. Mac Callum what? Ah, yes, child, what we were saying. I understand!"

"You will write to him, then; tell him I am very sorry — I am, indeed — and I will never do so any more," said the little maiden, in a tone of great compunction. "For the rest, brother, you know what to say."

"Yes, yes!" He drew his hand over his eyes. "I am very stupid, Tinie, but I did not quite hear you. My head aches; the sun so dazzles on the Loch. Tell me over again what you wish written, and I will do it at once. I rather think I shall walk to Dr. Reay's."

"Oh, don't write the letter there. Pray, pray don't tell the Reays anything about it. She would think, and he would think —"

"Think what?" said Ninian, attracted by the degree of alarm expressed by his sister.

"I don't care — I don't care — not a jot! The Professor may consider me what he likes — a foolish little thing 'of the genus Papilionaceæ,' as I heard him say. But I don't choose that Miss Reay, knowing I have refused Mr. Mac Callum, should therefore imagine — what she had the insufferable impertinence to tell me one day —"

"More confessions? Nay, wee thing! don't stammer. Let us have them!"

"She said I was trying — and you, too, in your eagerness to get me married — that — that I should be made her niece. There, you have it now! No wonder I was in a passion; no wonder I have been playing all sorts of wild games. She shall never think I want to catch people that have all brains and no heart — dry, musty, geological, old —"

"Nay, keep that foolish little head cool. Nobody with any sense, certainly not Kenneth Reay himself, would ever dream of such a ridiculous thing," said Ninian, trying to reassume his ordinary manner, and to turn his mind to the things she was talking about. But he heard them and answered through a mist; they made no impression upon him. Only once more he attempted to send away Tinie, dismissing her with a smile and a jest.

"Go home, lassie, I will keep your counsel. And don't get into more love-labyrinths, for your sage elder brother to have to dash in and rescue you. He might get lost himself, you know."

"Oh, no fear! Nothing would ever bewilder brother Ninian," cried the blithe creature, as she turned back and went singing along the shore of the sunny Gare-Loch.

Ninian shut his ears to the sound, so mocking as it seemed. Evil, cruel thoughts hovered round his heart; — it is so horrible to see others making a light game of the things which to us are life or death! He felt almost as if he were beginning to love his young sister less. There she danced over the sands — happy, fair, the future before her unclouded by a single care; of a nature so light that even love itself became to her a toy, a plaything, to be taken up or cast down just as she chose, without troubling her happiness. While he —

"Well! It might be all the same, if she were dancing over her brother's heart, as she danced over the sands. She would probably heed it as little!"

So thought Ninian, and then despised himself for the wickedness. He turned his feet and fled, walking rapidly, dashing over rocks and through shallow inlets of

tide, trying to weary himself. Perhaps calm would come with exhaustion; or, as in the story of the poor possessed one, which haunted his fancy strangely, "the devil would go out of him, leaving him half dead."

He seemed half dead indeed, when, late in the afternoon, he came to the Professor's door. It was one of those white staring houses that glitter like rows of teeth along the Helensburgh shore. As Ninian stood still, there beat upon him the same dazzling sun. He wished it would rain, or that night would fall: he could bear anything better than having to walk perpetually under that clear, relentless light of day. It seemed like the life he would have henceforth to lead; with all the loving eyes of his household shining down upon him, entering, or trying to enter, into his inmost soul, compelling him to say, "It is warm, it is pleasant," when all the while every ray would be burning into his brain like fiery arrows. How would he ever endure it all?

But man can endure — ay, everything that God sends. We never need quail under burdens of His laying on; we may stagger under them awhile, but they will not crush us. Nothing ever crushes a human soul but the weight of its own sin, or of another's dearer than itself. And duty, like a sort of inner mail, supports while it compresses; so that often the man walks more upright and firm for the iron bands that tighten round his breast; while over all flows the outer robe, smooth and fair in all eyes — save those of pitying angels.

Ninian Græme felt cheered when his friend Kenneth's cordial grasp awaited him at the door. Despite Miss

Reay's frowns, the two men, establishing themselves at the fire, began to converse and argue as men will do and can do — using their strong brains as a defence against their hearts.

"I declare I am tired of your 'ologies' and stuff, Mr. Græme; you will surely agree with me that my nephew ought now to have a complete holiday, for, except the few times he has been with me to your cottage, he has done nothing but work."

"I am sure, aunt," began the unhappy Professor, —

"Now, don't say that work is good for you, and don't say that you can't live without books. My dear Kenneth, I have proved to you your errors over and over again; I am sure if you had not me to take care of you, you would not live a year."

The Professor sighed, as if under such circumstances he did not much mind about it. He looked altogether so broken-spirited and melancholy, that Ninian forgot himself in coming to the rescue of his friend.

Blessed things are the small charities of life, which throw us out of ourselves, our cares, and struggles, and draw us tenderly back within the circle of human interest! Mr. Græme, constraining himself to civility towards the Lady of the Tongue, interposing between her and her much-enduring nephew, trying to lure the silent Kenneth into the only sort of conversation in which he seemed to delight, began to look and feel something like himself.

"Dear me, I think your sisters ought to see after you and mind that you don't take such awful walks again. You quite frightened me when you came in, Mr. Græme. I have a great mind to go over to-morrow to tell Miss

Græme all about it, and give her a long lecture concerning you for the future."

"You are very kind, Miss Reay," said Ninian, abruptly; "but it will be too late. My holiday is over. I leave for Edinburgh the day after to-morrow."

"Oh, what a pity! How sudden! It is only a few days since your sister Tinie was here with that delicate, pretty little friend or cousin of yours, — which is she?"

"Neither. My ward."

"You are rather young for a guardian — and sometimes these things end — Well, as I was saying, your sister and Miss Ansted thought you would stay a whole month, and they seemed so pleased. Surely you must have changed your mind very suddenly. Business, I suppose? Such *very* particular business is it? Anything which sisters don't exactly understand, eh?"

Ninian muttered some brief reply. The woman chafed him past endurance. He thanked Heaven that none of the girls at home were gifted with a tongue! Yet there his poor friend sat, the picture of patience, toasting his knees at the fire, with a dull, tired aspect, like that of one stupified to sleep by the noise of a mill.

"I half thought of asking for a bed here," said he, in an under tone. "But, on consideration, I will go back to the Gare-Loch. Could you not come with me?"

"Wait till she 's gone to bed; she always goes early. We can start then!"

Ninian was inclined to smile at the Professor's frightened look, but he kept his countenance; only thinking, as he himself grew restless under the perpetual click-clack of Miss Reay, that there were minor evils hard to bear, and that after all there was great peace by his own fireside.

The two friends started, walking through a night which had now grown blustering, gloomy, and cold. Across the point of Rue came sweeping the mountain wind, curling the Loch here and there into specks of white foam, that glittered while everything else was dark. The Professor walked on, striding with his long legs — sometimes silent — sometimes talking in his solemn, dreamy way, of the appearance of the heavens, the meteorology of the season, and other topics pertaining thereto. He never descended to mundane matters at all. And so, he walking with his head directed towards the stars, and his thoughts among them — Ninian trusting to him for guidance, and heeding little whither they went — it chanced that after an hour's wandering they found themselves again nearing the lights of Helensburgh.

"This will never do. We must have missed our way, and my legs are fairly worn out. Come, Reay, you and I have no fear of the Clyde by night or by day. Suppose we take a boat at the Rue, and I'll row you up the Loch?"

The Professor was quite satisfied with this — his only terror seemed to be going home. Ere long he had placed himself at the stern of the boat, and lay contemplating a dawning Aurora Borealis, by the light of which his face was seen wearing a look of such sublime content that Ninian positively envied him.

"You are a happy man, Kenneth. No worldly cares move you. Nature is your mother, and Science your mistress."

"I never knew any mother but the one, and no mistress will ever smile on me except the other," said the Professor, with that quiet sadness which sometimes

was perceptible in his manner. And then he turned once more to watch his Aurora.

Ninian used all his strength to urge the boat along, for it was late, and he knew Lindsay's fears of old. Perhaps also he remembered that whenever he had chanced to be out longer than usual, two fair eyes — not his sister's — were always lifted up to meet him with an anxious inquiry. He thought of them — but it was with a sort of terror; the vague terror which had of late seized him, lest by any possibility — impossible now — in the future which must be, he himself might prove not the only sacrifice. Far over the waters he seemed to see them — the eyes once child-like, in which he sometimes fancied was dawning a new expression. Most hard, most cruel appeared the fate which made the hope of requited love, that would have been another man's joy, his own most bitter dread.

Almost fearing to near his home, he yet rowed on, putting forth all his might against the waves. But the wind rose suddenly, and the quiet Gare-Loch became a tempestuous sea, wherein the little boat was tossed about like a feather. Ninian paused upon his almost useless oars, and looked round with some uneasiness.

"I fear this was a mad freak, Reay; my strength is almost gone, and you cannot take an oar."

The poor votary of science shook his head. He had never studied anything so merely physical as rowing. "If it were a matter of navigation, great circle-sailing for instance," said he, with a helpless, apologetic self-defence that was half comical —

"No, no; great circle-sailing would not assist you in getting safe through the Gare-Loch. I must trust to myself alone — under Heaven," Ninian added, more

softly, as there came upon him the grave reality that they were in no little danger; that boats had sometimes been lost on the Loch in wild nights such as this.

"Heaven forbid," muttered he, struck by the fear, not of being drowned — he had much of that physical courage which braves death — but of all the miseries his death would bring. "Those children — my God! those children!" he thought; and all his brotherly love came back into his heart, until he wondered how it had been temporarily driven thence — how he could ever have wished, as he had done not many hours before, that Heaven would release him, without sin, from the burden of life — a life so precious, so indispensable to them.

"Kenneth, I fear I cannot hold out much longer," said he, gravely. "If the worst comes to the worst, and we should never reach home —"

The Professor, with all his wisdom, was timid as a child. He started up in blank dismay, making the boat reel beneath his long, gaunt frame.

"Keep still, or we shall both be lost," shouted Ninian; at the terror of which warning, Dr. Reay crouched down at the bottom of the boat, without another word. Once or twice he wrung his hands, and Ninian heard him mutter something about "my books, my books!" and "she 'll have them all;" but it was no time for offering consolation. With all his strength the young man rowed on, as if a life was in every stroke, for so he knew it was. Each minute he felt himself growing weaker and weaker, while his fingers were almost stiffening over the oars. The heavy waves he fought through drenched him continually, for he had thrown his coat to the poor Professor, who, with his inactive habits, always suffered extremely from cold.

"Reay, your eyes are used to the night. Can you find out whereabouts we are? I cannot see anything, it is so black."

It was, indeed. They might have been in the open sea, so far and shadowy seemed the mountains and the shore.

Kenneth half rose, and sat down again. He was thoroughly bewildered. Mechanically he looked up, muttering something about "the pole-star," but the sky was all one gloom. "If I could take soundings now," added he, with a dim notion that he was somewhere out on the Atlantic —

"If you could take an oar, my good fellow, it would be of more use in saving our lives. Well, ten minutes more will decide one way or the other, for I am getting as weak as a child — Heavens! there it goes!"

The force of the water had dashed one of the oars out of his half-numbed hands.

"One chance less — well, God's will be done!" And even his brave heart quailed, as all need for exertion gone, he sat upright, rocking in the unguided boat. As a last effort, he tried to scull with the remaining oar, but his strength was too much exhausted. There had been daring and excitement in the struggle with the waves. It was a horrible thing to have to sit still and be drowned.

Despairingly he looked round, and, as if his eyes had gained an unnatural sharpness of vision, he saw the outline of the shore. They were not two dozen boats' lengths from the little quay of stones, where day after day the young crew had merrily embarked, and merrily landed. Nay, further on, shining through the blank night, was a light.

"That must be our house," said Ninian, hoarsely. "They are sitting up for me — poor things! If they only knew! Can you swim?" shouted he to Reay, with a wild desire of daring anything, could he only reach the shore alive.

But the Professor was no Leander; in fact, as regarded all manly exercises, he had never made use of his body at all — only his mind.

"Try!" pursued Ninian, in his uncontrollable longing. For, whenever he looked shorewards, he saw in fancy not only the light, but beneath it Lindsay's face, and Hope's; they usually sat up together. "Try! Leap out, and I'll support you. I feel strong now. Rouse up, Kenneth; is not one's life worth saving?"

"Not mine. Nobody will miss me," was the only answer the poor Professor made. All his wisdom — all his learning, were not equal to that one simple, lowly, household bond, which makes a man hold his life precious because it is precious to another.

Ninian heard, with something of pity, even remorse. He sat down again with a muttered, "God help us!" and let the boat be drifted on by the tide.

"Are you away?" said Kenneth, lifting his head from his knees. "Take your chance — never mind me — I'll stay in the boat."

"And be picked up somewhere about the Kyles of Bute to-morrow morning. That is, if the tide is going out. Otherwise, we may drift ashore. Cheer up, old friend; we'll hold out together somehow!" And Ninian stretched out his hand in the darkness, with a grasp that would have given strength and courage anywhere. Not a word more was said on either side.

The boat rocked on — whether shoreward or not,

they could not tell. That dim light glittered — now near — now distant — then vanished. It might have been a mere chance — the moving of a candle — the waving of a tree between; but it seemed to shut out hope and home. Even Ninian's courage ebbed; drawing in his useless oar, he leaned his face on his hands, and tried to say those words which the cry of human love drowns so often — "*Thy will be done.*"

Minutes or hours passed — both seem alike at such a crisis — when he felt the boat's keel grate against a rock. She had drifted ashore, near the head of the Loch.

"Thank God!" he said, as he had never said so fervently before. Life and strength came into him again; he leaped up, and, with his one oar, pushed and tugged until he had gained a landing. "Halloo!" he called to the Professor, who lay seemingly indifferent, at the bottom of the boat. "We're all safe now; a run along the shore, and by daybreak we'll be at home — at home!"

He shouted out the word, and then kept whispering it to himself; it was so sweet — so sweet! He dragged Kenneth along, walking as if he had never known exhaustion; not once stopping till he came to his own gate. There he paused.

"We'll not tell them, Reay, not to-night; we'll say we lost our way — you know."

At the sound of their footsteps there was a cry from some watchers within. Hearing it, all Ninian's strength left him; he staggered rather than walked to the house door.

"Don't be frightened, children! I am quite safe." And he sank on the sofa, unable to speak another word.

The children clung round him — at least, Lindsay and Tinie; the others were gone to bed.

"His coat is all wet, and his hair. He has been drowned! I'm sure he has been drowned."

"Almost — not quite, that is — don't be alarmed, Miss Christina," said the Professor, stalking in with his white ghostly face. He had at last recovered his reasoning powers and his tongue.

Tinie gave another little scream, and rushed up to him. "You, too! — oh, what has been the matter with you both?"

Whether Kenneth objected on principle to falsification, or whether he thought past danger would win for him another of those looks of interest and tenderness, certain it was that he forgot Ninian's injunction, and told the whole adventure to the shuddering Tinie.

"But you see, Miss Christina, your brother is come back alive and safe. And so have I — not that - that signifies much."

"It does signify. I am so glad — so glad," answered Tinie, holding his two great hands, her face glowing through real tears. But before he could answer, she had flitted away, and was aiding Lindsay to restore her brother.

Ninian lay some minutes not exactly in a swoon, but in something like it. He had just consciousness enough to hear the voices round him, and to miss among them one voice, softer than any of his sisters'. He opened his eyes. No; the child was not there. Yes, surely she was! A white figure had stolen in so quietly that nobody noticed it at first.

"Hope, my dear!" said Lindsay, "I thought I sent

you to bed an hour ago, and you have not even undressed. Go back — you will be ill — do go."

Still, she never moved from the foot of the sofa, but stood looking at Ninian, her face perfectly blanched with fear. He smiled, and held out his hand. She came and clasped it, not weeping, as Tinie did, but with a deep tenderness which she did not even try to hide. And, turn where he would, Ninian felt upon him her eyes, full of that unconscious girlish affection which a breath, a word, might doubtless awaken into love — a woman's love.

Oh, bitter, bitter strait, that what might have been his joy and crown was now an agony, a temptation, a terror, a thought to be smothered or wrestled with, as if it were an evil thing!

He did wrestle with it. Long after the excitement of the household had subsided, he, having sent them all away with smiles and caresses, lay alone in his chamber, to commune with himself and be still.

A strong, clear mind he had ever; ay, even amidst the rack of conflicting passions, whose force he now learned for the first time. He tried to put the case before him as though it were another man's, and to reason upon it calmly, if possible.

Supposing he and Hope loved one another — it was best to seize that delirious fancy first, and struggle with it — what would be the result? To marry, and add the cares and expenses of marriage to his other duties, was, as he had known from the time of his father's death, utterly impracticable. Then if being betrothed, they waited until his brothers were settled in the world, and his sisters wedded, by that time he would be almost an old man. He was old even now, while Hope was a

mere child compared with him. Her love might change; she might feel her promise a burden; or, if not, what right had he to win that which he could not claim?

He had not won her heart yet; her open affection forbade that fear — or joy, for so it seemed alternately. If he were never to let her see the anguished passion of his own, she would go away, keeping always a tender reverence for him; but still free to love. For he discerned that hers was the nature of many, nay, of most women, gentle and good; loving — not with that rare ideal devotion, pure as the tenderness of an angel, yet strong and self-sustaining as the passion of a man — but with the mild sweetness which is slow individually to feel, but ever ready to respond to affection, so that while the silent lover is timidly left unloved, the first who worthily woos is almost sure to win.

Thus, if he let her go, would Hope probably be won. The thought was to him such frightful agony, that for a moment he felt as if he could tear asunder all ties — — all duties — snatch the child, and fly with her to some new world, where she should be to him instead of brothers, sisters, land, or home — in the stead of everything but conscience.

That, at least, would never be stilled — never! He knew he should continually hear it, and shudder — ay, even at his wife's side — as though it were a cry like that which haunted Cain: "Where are thy brethren?"

— Six souls that loved and trusted him, balanced against one! Perhaps, even had the sacrifice included not himself alone but Hope, it ought to be made. Now, when Hope did not yet love him — when, if he kept firm to his iron will of self-renunciation, she never might love him — Yes! the right course must lie there.

"*When two paths of duty bewilder thee, and thou knowest not which is right to follow, choose that which to thyself is most full of thorns.*"

This wise, stern saying, knelled itself all night into Ninian's soul. Towards morning he slept, and dreamt that he was in a little boat with Hope — she looking at him with sad, sweet face, pale as that he had lately seen, but more tender and love-lorn — seeming to say, mutely, that no sin towards kindred was greater than that of breaking a fond woman's heart. Then, he thought, the great waves of the Loch rose and rose, rolling over them both. He snatched his darling, covering her eyes and mouth with wild kisses — lover's kisses — such as he had never dared to press there before. And then they two sank down — down — to something that he knew was death — yet which was calm, and without fear. Until at last they wakened together in the heavenly mansions, where there is "neither marrying nor giving in marriage;" but all love becomes pure as that of the angels of God.

He woke. Weakened by his long struggle of body and mind, he turned his head on the pillow, and wept like a child.

And all the while, in the next chamber Hope lay sleeping in Tinie's arms, or talking with her the pleasant nonsense that affectionate girls use — all unconscious of the strong heart writhing for her sake.

Jest and earnest — man's mere sport and woman's faith — woman's folly and man's wild despair — how often such contrasts are found in the world!

CHAPTER XII.

Two or three more days passed in the cottage by the Gare-Loch. Happy days! halcyon days, wherein morning brought night, and night waned into morning, and none wished the hours slower or faster. Ninian, somewhat ailing after that day — the whole story of which none but himself knew — was kept at home, under tender guardianship, "a giant bound with flowers," Tinie said. She, being a good deal humbled and subdued by the affair of unfortunate Mr. MacCallum (in whose disappearance the boys greatly gloried), was on her best behaviour with everybody, even with the Professor. Kenneth, worthy man, disported himself in her smiles like a porpoise in the sun, continually rising out of his native element — his deep sea of science — to look up at her with a sigh of gratification, which Edmund declared was a sound exactly like the "pech" of the porpoises in the Clyde. Whereupon Reuben used to inveigh warmly against such ridicule used towards so learned a man, whose only fault in the young cynic's eyes was that he condescended to notice a stupid, childish thing like Tinie.

It was one morning at breakfast, that Ninian, in the quiet way with which he always "made up his mind," observed, "Children, I must leave you, and go home to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" There was a general cry of complaint; Tinie's being the loudest, and Hope's the most pathetic.

Lindsay ventured to hint that if business were not very pressing he need not be uncomfortable about the deserted house. Miss Reay, lately vanishing to Edinburgh in considerable dudgeon, had consented to look after old Katie and The Gowans. If Ninian could but stay — just a few days more.

"I cannot; it is impossible!"

"But you are not looking quite yourself. You would be better for a longer holiday."

"No, no; do not ask me. I cannot do it," answered he, restlessly; and Lindsay said no more. But many a time during the morning he found her quiet eyes fixed on his face. Once, when all the rest were down by the shore, she came to him as he sat writing.

"Ninian, suppose we all went home together? I can easily manage it, if you would rather have it so."

"I? What made you think any such thing?"

"Because you looked so dull — so melancholy, when Tinie spoke of this being your last day with us at the Clyde."

"Nonsense. I am anxious to go home. I have so much work before me. Besides, how do you know that I am not quite glad to get rid of you all?"

It was a mere jest, but it did not sound exactly like his jest of old. Lindsay looked grave, ceased to speak, and let him go on with his writing. They were business letters — a tolerable number. He finished them; threw them on one side with a weary air, and sat idle, his head upon his hand.

"Is there anything the matter with you, Ninian?"

"The matter! Nothing at all. I wish, sister, you would not fidget yourself and me. Indeed it is unnecessary." He spoke, not angrily, but still not as he used

to speak. The minute afterwards he repented. "You see I am so idle here — I shall end by getting cross. I almost think I have been cross lately. Tinie positively accused me of it this morning."

"Tinie is a thoughtless lassie — enough to vex anybody. If you did say a hasty word sometimes, she ought not to mind it."

"Which implies that I do say it. Tell me plainly. You don't think I am unkind to these children?" said he, with a look of great anxiety.

"Never! You could not be unkind. But I have thought now and then —"

"What! have you, too, found something to blame me with? Well, tell me, and I'll try to alter anything in me that gives you offence."

"Ninian!"

"Forgive me, I never ought to say one hard word to you. But, you see, your brother is not quite so good as you all imagine. It is a hard world, and he has to fight hardly through it. Business now troubles me. The children need not know this, which is the —" the truth, he was about to say, but stopped. He knew it was *not* the truth.

"Yes, I understand; I have thought so more than once, and said so to Hope, when she fancied you were vexed with her."

"Have I been harsh to her?"

"Nay — not harsh; but you have seemed to take less notice of her. And she is a sensitive little thing, with such a tender heart, though no one would have imagined that, so frozen up as she appeared at first, so quiet as she is even now. I often fancy nobody knows

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...re. I do love her as well,
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... pleaded the gentle Lindsay,
... the least shadow creeping
... She is a foolish little creature
...t whenever you look grave,
... than usual, she fancies you
... of her father."
... what can I do?" muttered
... there was that gaze which,
... loving ones, was ever upon
... almost wild. He must meet

"You know, Lindsay, that this is untrue, and altogether a mistake of Hope's. You must put the thought entirely out of her mind. Speak to her at once."

"Why should not you, brother? It would come so much better from you."

"I cannot — I cannot! I mean," added he, quickly, "that I am getting too old to deal with girls' fancies. I am quite a gruff, elderly man, you know. It is time to give up having pets among young people, if I use them so badly that even my sister takes their part against me."

Lindsay looked up in blank astonishment. "Is it true, then, Ninian? Are you really annoyed with poor little Hope, or with me? Indeed, I will not tease you any more."

With a smile, in which she vainly tried to hide all pain, Miss Græme gathered up her knitting and was leaving the room. But Ninian put his hand on her shoulder.

"Sister, it was I who teased you. I am indeed getting as cross as Tinie said. But you do not know, Lindsay — you do not know!"

He looked in her face — his elder sister — his mother's only daughter — she, from whose childish remembrance had come his sole knowledge of a tie lost at his birth — she, wo had tried, even in her girlhood, to be grave, and tender, and motherly over him; who, as he grew up to manhood, had done a harder thing, gradually sinking the superiority of eldership, and becoming *only* a sister — yielding to his stronger mind, and taking beside him silently the proper, the woman's place. But he felt at times, and did now, as if he should like to go back to the old days when he — still a boy — used to

come and hide his face in his elder sister's lap, telling her all his troubles. There was a subdued, childlike pathos in his voice, as once more he said, "Oh Lindsay, you do not know!"

She turned in great alarm; so much, that he knew he must unsay his words, change his look, and go back to the former ways.

"You do not know how tired out I was with this year's anxiety. Besides, I have not felt quite well, I own."

"Poor Ninian! I must take better care of you," said Lindsay, in a voice more like the fondness she used towards him when he was a boy than the quiet deference with which she always treated him now. "I wish you would let me go home with you to-morrow."

"What! and leave our young flock to guard themselves? We should have a second edition of the Mac Callum affair, for certain."

Our Sister looked serious. "I had not thought of that. Oh, Ninian!" she said, with a sort of despairing sigh, "what a pity our young people will grow up! What will we do with them all? There's Tinie — such a wild, gay creature! — and Hope, getting prettier every day, except that she is such a child still. And I don't think she will take to Tinie's thoughtless ways!"

"Indeed!"

"No," continued Lindsay, waxing more tender over her favourite as Ninian seemed to wax cold. "She has a warm heart; she will trifle with no one's feelings. Heaven grant that no one may ever trifle with hers."

"Amen!" said Ninian, beneath his breath. He felt strong to do as he had willed. He was one of those

who can cut off a right arm, and pluck out a right eye, and so enter maimed into heaven.

It was a dull day, the last of Ninian's stay, though he tried to enliven them all; and at last, seeing his mirth disregarded, and his jokes melting heavily on the air, proposed a sail up the river — a sort of leave-taking of the Clyde.

"Not in the little boat," cried Hope. "Oh! Mr. Græme, you will not put yourself into such danger again?"

He looked once, only once, at her anxious face, and said, "Still timid, Hope? You will never do for a Scottish lassie. But come, children all! we will take the steamboat to Rothesay and back."

They did so, except Lindsay and Edmund; calling for the Professor on their way — much to Tinie's objection, who said he was such a queer looking man, and either sat dumb or talked so loud and lengthily, that she was quite ashamed to be seen in public with him. Which feeling probably accounted for the fact that she went and hid herself behind the man at the wheel until Kenneth Reay, looking anxiously for her, was induced to sit there and converse; when she listened, mockingly, yet still she listened, to a learned discourse on the peculiar currents of the Clyde, the supposed origin of the Kyles of Bute, or the geological formation of the Great and Lesser Cumbrays.

It was a still autumn afternoon, just dull enough to lay dark blue shadows on the hills that stood grand and cold around the Holy-Loch, and afterwards breaking into just sun enough to show the two pale ghost-like peaks of Arran lying on the horizon like a cloud.

Ninian stood by himself, watching the line of either

shore, the views changing momently, fairer at every change. He thought of his happy days here — happier than any since his boyhood — and of the little dark office in Edinburgh where he would be on the morrow. It would look darker than ever now. He began to wonder when he should have another holiday, and somehow, by a concatenation of ideas impossible to account for, he remembered an old tale which his grave father had used to tell, years ago, of the only real holiday *he* ever had in his youth. It was when he brought his bride — Ninian's mother — to spend their honeymoon by the Clyde. The son — he who now looked on the same hills and the same rivers — thought how his parents had looked on them once, with eyes shining joy into each other — he had heard that his father and mother were a very loving couple. But it would not do to dwell on these things. He turned and gazed down in the seething, foamy waves that danced in the wake of the engines, until he felt all dazzled.

"It will make your head ache if you look down at the waves in that way," said a voice gentle as ever, but a little more hesitating and shy than it had been a week ago. He had left Hope talking merrily with the twins, and it quite startled him to see her at his side. He tried, but could not move away from that frank smile, that voice of innocent tenderness. He thought, as he did sometimes, in the horribly conflicting moods of his mind, that perhaps his stern consciousness was only egregious vanity, and that there was no need to be so guarded with the child.

So he let her lean beside him and talk, even laying his hand on her shoulder, in his old habit. She was such a little thing standing by his side.

"Well, Hope, when you grow older, and see all sorts of beautiful places, perhaps even go to America —"

"You will speak of my going to America; you have done so once or twice lately. Indeed, I don't want —" She stopped abruptly, possibly with the silent pain that she always seemed to feel on alluding to her father. Ninian's heart yearned over her, but it, too, was dumb. Hope said at last, "And when I do see all these places, what then?"

"You must remember your first acquaintance with my beautiful Clyde; it is my own river, for I was born, and my mother died there." And he pointed to the town of Dunoon, with its curved bay, its Castle-hill, and the wooded hills rising above the pretty town, now growing dim behind them.

"Yes, I know. Lindsay told me as we passed," said Hope, her sweet face saddening, so easily touched is youth. She drew closer to Ninian, as if, despite the long interval of years, he still needed sympathy — women do so love to play the comforter. But he did not speak, and his countenance was blank and hard, even though he was looking across the river to his own birth-place, — his mother's grave. Perhaps he was thinking — we all have such thoughts at times — that it was a pity he had ever come into the weary world at all.

Hope, standing beside him, sighed.

"What do you sigh for, little one?" said he, with a faint mockery of his old familiar tone. "Am I too grave for you? Had you not better run back to the children?"

"No; unless you had rather I went away. Is it so?"

For his life he could not have withstood the pained,

beseeching voice. "Come, my child, we may never have another sail down the Clyde. Stay here, and we will look out together."

So, drawing her arm in his, they stood for a long time.

"Mr. Græme," Hope began at last. She had always addressed him thus, of course not saying "Brother," as the rest did, and never dreaming of the presumption of calling him „Ninian."

"Well, Hope, I hear. Your wee face seems burdened with some secret. If so, out with it."

"I am afraid." She hesitated, and her colour came and went so fast that Ninian felt a painful fear.

"Any more of Tinie's wild doings?" asked he, uttering something near, but not exactly his thought. "Another MacCallum, I suppose? — they seem to grow on every hedge. Has Tinie been putting her nonsense into your head too?"

"Oh, no! Do not be angry! Tinie does, indeed, tell me everything; but I always tell her, too, where I think she is wrong. I could not help that affair of Mr. MacCallum, but bitterly it grieved me. I would not have done such a thing for the whole world!"

No, she would not. Her eyes, the mirror of her heart, spoke that. There was in her little of firmness, less of passion, but in all she felt she was sincere. Ninian's old terror awoke. Agonised lest, in years to come, he might do her wrong, he almost wished that instead of her own sweet, simple, loving self, she had been more like Tinie.

He answered her in a grave, guardian-like tone. "I hope, my dear child, that whenever your time for these things comes, you will treat me as you should

treat your father, were he with you, and tell me all your mind."

"Of course I should. It would be but right, you know." She blushed a little, but looked up straight in his face. Hitherto at least, she had evidently nothing to hide. He ought to have been satisfied and glad. But was he? Oh! strange contradiction of human nature! At the very knowledge in which his conscience rejoiced, his weak heart recoiled in pain. He did not speak again for many minutes.

"Mr. Græme," once more began Hope, trembling with her desperate perseverance, "still I have not said what I wanted to say to you."

"Say on, then."

"I — I have been thinking of myself a great deal lately."

"That is something new," he answered, with much tenderness. The truth of his speech was proved by the fact that she never even noticed it.

"And the result is, I want to do as my father said — I want to be a governess." This declaration, which had apparently been weighing down her poor little heart for some minutes, came out at last, and left her perfectly frightened at her own daring.

Ninian, whatever warfare he felt within him, resorted as ever to his only support, ambush, and shield — silence.

"Are you angry with me? — have I said anything wrong? — or" — the innocent trouble would find its way at last — "do you care for me less than you used to do?"

"My dear," said Ninian, with sad, grave voice, "Lindsay told me all you have fancied lately, and I told

her to assure you it was not true. I care for you as much as ever I did."

The child, smiling content, read that truth on his face; angels in heaven might have read, weeping for pity, the deeper truth branded upon his writhing heart.

"Was it that fancy, Hope, which made you speak about being a governess? or must I ask, as I did once before, are you getting tired of us?"

"You remember that night? — how kind! But as I said then I say now. I could never be tired of you. I wish I were indeed one of the 'Miss Græmes,' as people so often suppose I am; then I should live always at The Gowans, and never leave you. Yet, though I were your sister, it would make no difference; if I thought as I think now, I should leave you still."

"Ay, I suppose so," said Ninian, bitterly.

Hope was first surprised, then looked ready to cry; but there was evidently something in her mind that kept up her courage, in the only way by which such yielding creatures ever have courage — some purpose that draws its root not from the will but the heart. What that purpose was, she seemed far too timid to show.

"Well, child," continued Ninian, "do you want my advice concerning your scheme? I thought you already knew what I thought on that subject, at least as far as regards my own sisters. I would rather die than let Tinie or the twins quit their brother's roof to turn governesses."

"I know that; but I am not your sister."

"That is true; I have no right over you, at least, no right but of advising, and that only while you are pleased to allow the same."

Poor Ninian! Strange that the best men in the

world, when racked by great mental conflict, wound those they most cherish and never even know it.

Hope made one desperate effort more. "If you are angry with me, if I should do this against your will, I will say nothing about it; but go back to The Gowans."

"You did not wish to go back to The Gowans, then, child! Is there any mystery that I am not to know?" cried he; and his wild jealous fancy lighted on every probability, remembered what a noble, manly fellow Edmund was growing, and how, since they came to Clyde-side, he had ceased to neglect Hope, and even openly praised her beauty. Was there any new vexation rising up in that quarter? Hope's answer decided the point.

"There is no mystery at all; even Tinie does not know this feeling in my mind, though it was talking to her that first awakened it. You know she tells me everything; she told me — please forgive her and me too, if it was wrong — but she told me all your conversation together the day she walked with you towards Helensburgh. Oh, Mr. Græme, why do you look so? Are you quite sure you are not angry?"

"Angry? Foolish little thing! Nay, go on."

"I thought — but I am ashamed to tell you my idle thoughts."

"You must!" And he looked her full in the face, bracing his strength to anything that might come. "My sisters keep back nothing from me. You would not have less trust in me, or think worse of me, than they?"

"I! If you only knew what I do think of you, but I can't tell it — I never can," answered Hope, in a

broken voice. "What I mean is this — though I know I shall never say it as I ought — that here have I been living in your house a year; these" — she hesitated, blushing scarlet — "these very clothes I wear are your giving — you that work so hard, and have so many brothers and sisters, while I — oh! cannot you understand me now?"

"Yes, I do, my child, my dear Hope!" he answered with inexpressible tenderness. Something more than love was awaking in him towards his darling. He began to reverence her, as a man should ever reverence the woman in whom he sees his future wife.

His wife. The thought sprang up in his heart like a light; the next moment he had trodden it out to ashes.

"So," he continued, determined to speak thus, that no coming time might leave any doubt, "my little Hope knows all about me; that I will have to work hard all my life, at least the greater part of it, and that my boys and girls need never hope to run wild without their stern old bachelor brother to look after them?"

"I know!" said Hope, accustomed to his way of putting gravest things in jesting fashion, and looking at him with eyes that spoke her full heart.

"But if I do this cheerfully, willingly — feeling that giving some things I receive others — tenderness, honour, home-happiness — if my sisters are content, and do not wish to run away from me, not even to get married, as Miss Reay kindly proposed — why should not my little Hope do as they?"

"Because I am not your sister, and because (if this is wrong for me to say, I am very sorry) I am afraid that those who might care for me do not, and will never

send for me home again. So, what I shall have to do some day, I may as well do at once, and try to be a governess."

"God forbid!" said Ninian earnestly; and he then began to reason with her, treating her like a woman and an equal, showing her all the hardships and hindrances of her scheme. But still she kept firm, firmer than he had ever known her. She never contradicted, not one word, yet he saw she was not moved a jot. Her thorough woman's nature — woman-like even to its weakness — had only two points of firmness, saving strongholds when all the rest yielded — a clear right-mindedness, an unerring affection. These sustained her now.

Ninian tried her in every way; — at last, with an argument that while wielding made his own heart to quiver —

"There is one thing more besides the world's cares — its dangers. You are very young, and — I may as well speak the plain truth, for I dare say you know it already — very beautiful."

She smiled, innocently, yet proud. "I am glad you think so, as Tinie and Lindsay do. I was pleased when they first told me of it. I myself always love people ten times more when I fancy them beautiful."

There came a strange convulsion over the face, so "hard-featured" as it was. "Well then, being beautiful, other people will perhaps love you the more, or at least admire you. This admiration might harm you, wrong you, insult you." And he seemed to take a stern pleasure in using the words, until he saw she did not understand them in the least.

"I do not see that. If women admired me, I should get more kindly treated; if any gentleman told me I was

handsome, and that he loved me for it, of course — supposing he were good — I should marry him, and be very happy."

Truly the heart, crushed and frozen down through childhood and early girlhood, was now the most utter piece of unworldliness it was possible to conceive. Ninian shuddered at the bare thought of admitting even the glare of daylight upon its unstained snow.

"I tell you, you must give up this notion. You are a child, knowing nothing. My little Hope — my innocent one — I would rather cut off this right hand than that it should let you go."

He spoke in passion smothered but strong, holding her so tight that her little fingers struggled as if in pain.

"Did I hurt you, my darling — my poor wee birdie!" said he, in an accent of wild fondness. And then his true soul came into him again. "I am rather rough in my manner, Hope, but you must attribute it all to my strong interest in you, and my sense of responsibility your father left with me. Until he claims you — and he may do so ere long — I trust so, if it would relieve your mind to quit us and go to him —"

"Oh, no! don't speak of that! I mean — nay, I don't clearly know what I mean, except that I love you all so much. I would never have dreamed of parting from you, except that I thought it right."

("My true one!" throbbed the upright heart, against which she must not, could not be suffered to rest — but its voice was silent.)

"I know," Ninian said, "you would do everything you thought right; but in this case you must let me judge. You must go back, for a time at least, until

your father receives you — or till" — there was one jarring tone, and his voice went cheerfully on as before — "till that 'gentleman' unknown, whom we alluded to, shall make his appearance."

She smiled — shook her head — saying, in girlish fashion, "She could wait — indeed, she rather hoped never to marry at all."

"Well, until you change your mind, be content to think yourself one of my sisters, whom it would grieve me inexpressibly to lose."

"Would it? oh, would it? I don't deserve that you should be so kind to me — such a man as you — so good, so — Oh, if it would not make Tinie jealous, I think even she herself could not love her brother more than I!"

"Oh, God!" he gasped, turning his head away, so that she neither saw nor heard, "how will all this end! But," whispered his strong heart, leaping up in stern joy, "*One* only feels — *one* only suffers! It is well — ay, it is very well!"

CHAPTER XIII.

NINIAN went home. With his usual independent will, he rose early, and was off in the grey morning, saying good-by to nobody except Lindsay, who had heard him stirring, and came to his door.

"Will you not let me go with you?" was her last entreaty, as she looked up to his eyes, heavy with unrest. "You are still not well?"

"Not quite. Never mind — I must cure myself all alone. But," he added, turning back with his foot on the threshold, "it is really nothing. Do not tell the children."

So he went away from the sunny Gare-Loch — sunny now no more, but wrapt in a dusky mist. River and mountains faded from his sight — his holiday was over.

A man who can give up dreaming and go to his daily realities — who can smother down his heart, its love or woe, and take to the hard work of his hand — who defies fate — and if he must die, dies fighting to the last — that man is life's best hero.

I dare say it would be more interesting and poetical if I were to paint Ninian Græme leaning over the boat's side, and dropping womanish tears into the Clyde, and lying back in the railway-carriage spent by the exhaustion of emotion. But he did not. Whatever he felt, Heaven knoweth! and Heaven is merciful, tender, and dumb! The only words he said were, "I must go home and work."

Work — work — work! It is the iron ploughshare that goes over the field of the heart, rooting up all the pretty grasses, and the beautiful, hurtful weeds, that we have taken such pleasure in growing, laying them all under, fair and foul together — making plain, dull-looking arable land for our neighbours to peer at; until at night-time, down in the deep furrows, the angels come and sow.

Ninian did not go to The Gowans. He might have felt a repugnance to Miss Reay, now temporary regent there by Lindsay's wish. "It will help her out until the Professor takes his new house; and she is a thrifty, kindly body, though she has such a tongue," remarked Our Sister, who had a good word for everybody. So Miss Reay was put in charge of The Gowans. Possibly Mr. Græme objected to be included in that consignment, or, knowing how hard he must work, he would not suffer himself to dream in that lonely house — in the parlour where he and the child had sat night after night during Lindsay's illness — in the study whither he had carried her, and where, for all he knew, the flowers he had put beside her every morning, even the last morning, might be mouldering on their dead stalks yet. He might have thought of these things, or he might not; but he certainly drove at once to his office, ensconced himself there, and finally began to think — as he found a letter from his friend, Mrs. Forsyth — whether he could not contrive to go down every night to sleep at Musselburgh, until his household absentees came home.

Innumerable slight necessities had gathered round him, showing that Ninian Græme could not be missed from his place for three weeks without somebody wanting him and feeling his loss. His brow was less heavy, the

hard lines about his mouth softened, as he applied himself to these small needs and kindly charities that clustered in his way. Finishing them, he thought, half smiling, half sorrowful, of a line in his favourite author — usually a favourite with common-sense people, as being at once the truest, greatest, and most common-sense poet in the world:

> "Heaven does with us as we with torches do,
> Not light them for themselves."

He wondered, with one of his quaint conceits, whether a certain torch he knew would crackle or writhe in the burning, and how long it would be before it was quite burnt out. It was a long time since he had been at Musselburgh — not since the fever had come into his household — except the night when he had taken Rachel home. He thought of her, and of what had become of her; half reproaching himself for having thus thought for the first time. But he had been so dead to everything in the world outside while dwelling in that sweet, still Eden on the shores of Clyde. Coming out of it, all things and all people looked like shadows seen a long time ago, and half forgotten since. He almost marvelled to find the old town of Musselburgh standing where it did, with its dull, slow river, and Prince Charlie's bridge, over which he had walked with Mr. Ulverston a year before. Thinking of Mr. Ulverston took him back to that sweet evening at Ardmore, after which the young Englishman had disappeared from Clyde-side. Ninian had been sorry at the time, but did not much mind it now. It seemed as if all acquaintanceships, ay, and dearer ties, were growing pale and distant. Until he stood at Mrs. Forsyth's gate, he did not even think of his old friend John.

"Mr. Græme, is that you? I am so glad to see you," was the widow's hearty welcome, as she came running out from the inferior regions of her dwelling, with a small iron in one hand, and in the other a pair of minister's bands. She showed them to Ninian with a motherly pride. "I'm busy, you see; my John is quite better, and going to try to preach next Sunday. I was feared that I would never see him in the pulpit again; but God is good, and has let the poor widow keep her ae bairn."

The tears were in her eyes. She spoke with unconscious pathos, using the accent of her homely youth, though in general she prided herself on her superior breeding, as becoming the mother of a minister.

Ninian shook her hand warmly, to the imminent risk of the snowy cambric of which she seemed so proud "Is John here, then? It will be such a pleasure to see him again. You did not tell me he was come?"

"I did not know. I left him at his manse last week, and he followed me yesterday. He could not do without his mother, and he wanted to preach here. He said his first sermon after this long illness should be in the kirk where he preached that afternoon — do you mind? when your sisters were all there, and I and — that daft hizzie?"

"Hush!" said Ninian, wishing to stop the mother's bitter speech, as just then John Forsyth was seen walking up the garden.

There are some faces to whom hard lines come naturally — faces born to grow sharp and dark; but his, so fair, so mild, so delicate! it was a pitiful thing to see it ploughed into unnatural harshness. Apostle-like he still looked, but the softness of St. John was changing

into the stoniness of St. Peter. His eyes had a fierce light — the enthusiasm that might in time become fanaticism; his gesture as he walked was abrupt, irregular. At the sight of Ninian he started, and seemed inclined to turn back, but recovered himself, and met his old friend. They shook hands silently.

"Are we interrupting you, John?" said the anxious mother, seeing he looked discomposed, and his answers to Ninian were brief and cold. "You see, Mr. Græme, he is busy learning his sermon off by heart — it is a very hard task upon him."

"Yes," said Ninian, anxious to pass into some conversation which might distract the painful emotion which he saw was changing his friend's countenance from pale to ashen, though not a muscle quivered — "it is very hard upon our Scottish ministers — the prejudice that congregations have against a read sermon. It seems to me mere folly. What difference can there be between a sermon written and read, and another written and preached from memory? If I were a minister, I would brave public opinion at once, rather than give myself such needless trouble."

"Trouble!" said John Forsyth, his wild eye flashing. "Trouble! when it is for God's service, and done to win souls! Ay, there it is; we care not what we do to gain the things of this world, but when Heaven asks aught from us, we call it *trouble.* You err, Ninian — you greatly err."

There was a quick, stern dogmatism about him, quite new in the gentle John Forsyth. He seemed ready to dash out his opinions like firebrands, little caring where they alit. If such incendiaries get among God's harvest, they burn up wheat and tares together.

"Eh, but I am sure this is trouble enough to you, John," interposed the mother. "You that are telling me every day how poor your memory is of late, and how you cannot keep your mind to your book-learning. It's no that easy, your minister's work."

"I do not want it easy. It shall be hard — the harder the better. I will not offer that which costs me nothing."

"If we give willingly and in love, we never think of the cost, be it great or small," Ninian ventured to say. "I am sure no minister ever devoted himself to Heaven more earnestly than John Forsyth."

"I did — I did! I used, when I was a child, to feel like a little Samuel — a Timothy! and when I grew a youth, I would have been a Renwick — an Alexander Peden. But it is not too late — I hope in God it is not too late!"

"How could it be too late, John, when you are so young — when you have talent enough to become one of the most popular among our ministers?"

"Popular!" he sternly repeated. "That would be only another form of self. I should but serve the devil a second time."

This was the only allusion he had yet made to the conflict he had passed through, or the passion which had consumed him. Out of the fire he came — safe, indeed, but scarred and seared into a likeness so changed from his old self that it might have been another man's. Ninian looked at him with other eyes and tenderer than heretofore. Alas! he understood these things now. Different, but yet alike, had been their years' history. He could have wrung John Forsyth's hand, and called him brother.

"So you are going to preach in the old kirk where you preached before?"

"Yes; it is my will. Perhaps the new vows I make regarding my future may be accepted there." And something in his look convinced Ninian of the one grand aim of the young minister's life now — self-abasement, penance for having been led astray.

"What are those vows, if you will tell me?" said Ninian. "You know well, John, that no one can be more anxious over your happiness than I."

"Happiness!" he repeated. It was a dangerous, torturing word to say to him as yet. Ninian repented of it.

"Your future, then, whatever it may prove. I hope it may be full of honour and peace."

"Do not talk of either; talk of duty. That is what I live for. The hardest, the fiercest, the most humbling, is the better fitted for me. Therefore I have resigned my church in the North. It is too quiet — the people are too virtuous — more so than their minister," he added, bitterly.

"John — John!" sighed his mother. She made no other murmur. His will seemed everything now.

"I will go through Scotland as a field-preacher. I would go abroad at once as a missionary, but that would be a life too easy — too much after my own longing when I was a boy. The things I most recoil from, those I must do. I am going up and down in cities and towns, among lanes and alleys, amidst all the vice and foulness I loathed so when we were boys, Ninian. If I preach anywhere, I will preach there."

"John, my pure bairn! ye will kill yourself;" sobbed the mother. He looked at her with a sort of compassion,

as if he did not belong to her; but gradually his heart melted, — it had been so gentle once towards her and every living thing.

"No; I will not kill myself, mother, if only for your sake."

"He said he couldn't do without me, you know," was the poor woman's confirmatory appeal to Ninian, as she came and stood by her son. He let her take his coat-sleeve, in the caressing way that mothers love; but he stood quite passive. Ninian's eye passed from him to the papers he held — his lately-written sermon. Its text was — "*He that loveth father or mother, or wife, or sister, or brethren, more than me, is not worthy of me.*"

And truly in the young minister's face — pale, rigid, yet lighted with the fire of religious devotion — Ninian read the sign of one who *was* worthy. God's service requires such — martyrs as well as apostles; and the "noble army" on earth makes the "goodly company of the prophets" in heaven. It is not hard.

John Forsyth sat down once more to study his sermon; while his mother and Ninian kept aloof, speaking in an under tone. They had talked long, and Mr. Græme had not yet ventured to put the question — a sore one, but which he was most anxious to have answered — concerning Rachel, when Mrs. Forsyth's handmaiden interrupted them, saying that a person without was asking for Mr. Græme.

"Some one of my clerks, probably. They might let me alone, when I have come all the way from the Gare-Loch since morning. Ask his message, will you, Jean?"

"It's no a man, sir," whispered the old servant, confidentially. "Gin I maun tell, it's a puir auld bodie that comed ance or mair after Mrs. Armstrong."

Whether the fault lay in Jean's tongue, or her mistress's suspicious ears, certain it was that Mrs. Forsyth caught the word. "What is that you say about —" She glanced at her son, and paused. "I tell you," said she, speaking in a quick under voice to Ninian, "if it is a message from *her*, you can do as you will, but I will never see her face more. She went away to her own folk at the Border, and ne'er a word have I heard of her sinsyne, nor care to hear. Blude's thicker than water, and I bear her nae ill-will; but I couldna see her, Mr. Græme — I couldna do it."

"You need not be frightened, ma'm," said an English voice, as Jane Sedley walked right into the room, with a marvellous dignity in her little crooked figure. "My mistress wouldn't see you, not upon any account. She told me to say so. It's Mr. Græme she wants, and nobody else."

"Then she may go to Mr. Græme's ain door, for she shall ne'er darken mine."

"Nay, my good friend, do not vex yourself," said Ninian. "Mrs. Sedley, shall I go and see your mistress at once, or can she wait until to-morrow?"

"She cannot wait — oh, sir, she cannot wait! She has been seeking for you since morning, and now it is quite night."

"Where is she?"

"In the garden. She would not enter the house."

"Nay, nor would I let her if she dared."

"Mother!" said John Forsyth. He had not stirred from his table at the far corner of the room. All their speech had been carried on in hasty whispers. They thought he had not heard, but he had. Ninian was sure of it the moment he saw the young man's face. "Mother!"

"Yes, my son."

"Let our cousin Rachel in!" Every word fell sharp, cold, and clear.

"But, my son — my dear John."

He repeated it again, only altering one word. "*Fetch* our cousin Rachel in."

Then he rose, made a show of collecting books to study, but went, leaving the lamp behind. With a slow, firm step, and eyes that never moved, but looked rigidly forward, he quitted the room. They heard him walk upstairs and bolt his door. Then all was silence.

Her son gone, Mrs. Forsyth's wrath burst out. "I marvel she daur show her face here, the heartless quean; she that wasna worth ae blink o' my John's sweet een. I'se warrant she repents her. But she'll no get him noo — she'll no get him noo!"

Her broad, shrill accents — broader and shriller the more angry she grew — were wasted on thin air. Ninian had left the room and followed Jane Sedley.

"There she is, sir, standing in the garden walk; speak gently, for she's not quite herself, I think."

"I am glad to see you again, Rachel," said Ninian. But she did not come to meet him, or stir in any way. In the darkness her face was indistinguishable, but her figure was seen, still and upright, like an effigy in stone. "I wish I had known you were seeking me. Do you want to speak to me about anything?"

"Yes."

"Will you come in with me, then?"

"No!"

("Alack! sir," whispered Jane, "those two words, 'Yes' and 'No,' are the only words I've been able to get out

of her these four-and-twenty hours. But she'll hear if I say more. Speak to her again, please.")

"Rachel, you need have no reluctance to enter; you will see no one but me. It will never do to stay here, this dark, rainy night. Come in then — indeed you must."

He took one of her hands — they were locked together, close and cold — but she made no resistance, and he led her into the house.

"Where must I bring her?" said he, as, leaving Rachel without the parlour door, he approached Mrs. Forsyth, who sat by her fireside, guarding its sanctity, the image of rigid propriety and bitter reproach.

"Bring her in here! You do not want to turn me from my own hearth, do you?"

Ninian brought the poor soul past the threshold, and set her in a chair. Truly "he brought" and "he set," for she seemed to do nothing of her own will or power, but just as she was ruled by another. As she sat there, her clothes dripping with rain, neither moving limb nor feature, Ninian saw that a great blow had fallen upon her.

"Aweel, woman," began Mrs. Forsyth, but without looking towards her, "what for do ye come? My son is quite better now. I was little feared he would break his heart for the like o' you. Ye need-na come speering after him, Rachel Armstrong, or whatsoever your name may be, for folk were saying strange things o' ye after ye choose to flit frae your cousin's house. But I suppose ye kenned naething o' thae tales — naething ava?"

"Nay, now, Mrs. Forsyth" —

"I'll say my say, Mr. Græme. She's my ain kith and kin, and I forgie her, as the Gospel bids us. But

my mind misgives me the lassie's gaun a' wrang, and I'll no see that without a word o' advice. Why could she no come here i' the daylight, like a decent body instead of daundering in at unseemly hours, looking as if she were gane wud, or something waur? Wha kens a' the truth? When lassies gae daft and say they're married" —

"I entreat you — nay, you *must* be silent," said Ninian's resolute voice; and he looked anxiously at Rachel. Her eyes were fixed on the angry woman, but the expression of her face never once varied.

"Rachel, what can I do for you? Do you hear me?"

"Yes, and her" —

"Mrs. Forsyth, indeed you must leave us. Rachel wishes to consult me, and you cannot expect her to do it before you, and after such upbraidings. Besides, you have forgotten your son."

Ninian was a man of judgment; he knew how to touch the light chords which guide humanity. After a few moments, Mrs. Forsyth left the room, and was heard knocking timidly at her son's door.

Ninian closed and fastened that of the parlour: he had a strong presentiment of the tale to be listened to — the crisis of poor Rachel's woe.

"Now, tell me," said he, in his soft, kind voice, — "tell me what has happened. What is it you wish to say to me?"

She looked round to assure herself that they were alone, then gave him slowly, and with a mechanical, business-like air, a paper, which he now saw she had held crushed in her left hand the whole time.

"I received this yesterday."

Mr. Græme unfolded it quickly. It was a blank

envelope, containing several Bank of England notes. His heart misgave him; but still he asked, as indifferently as he could, "Did she know from whom it came?"

"*He* sent it."

"Mr. Sabine, your —" Ninian paused upon the words "your husband," for he saw that at the very mention of the name of Sabine the life had come again into that poor frozen face. He had gone aside to examine the notes by the light of the lamp; Rachel got up and crossed the room to him, guiding herself by tables and chairs, her whole frame, once so rigid, quivering and swaying like one who rises from a dying bed and tries to walk.

"Do you see that?" she said, slowly, pointing with her finger to the envelope, which he had thrown aside.

It was in a hand somewhat round and forced, as if the writer wished to disguise it. The address was to *Miss Rachel Armstrong*.

Ninian looked — looked again; he would have turned his eyes anywhere rather than meet hers.

"What does he mean?"

"I cannot tell, Rachel! I must have time to think. Are you quite sure this writing is his?"

"I — not to know his writing! It is different, certainly; he — he intends it for a jest — I think so! Do not you?" said she, uttering the words painfully, with quick, short breath.

Ninian made no answer.

"You see, it must be a jest, or he would not write my name 'Rachel *Armstrong*.'" It seemed that all her will and mental power were expended in arranging these few consecutive words. Having uttered them, she stood,

her eyes fixed on Ninian; as if his next sentence — his next look — contained her doom.

But he remained quite silent, turning the papers over and over, in close examination. At last Rachel touched him on the arm.

"I cannot — I cannot," said he, huskily. "I mean I cannot give you an answer just yet. Sit down, my poor girl, and tell me more. Did this man —"

With something of the old wrathful pride lighting her eyes, she corrected him — "*My husband.*"

"Did he answer your letter? Have you had any sight or tidings of him until now?"

Her whole frame seemed to collapse with some nameless fear, as she faintly uttered "No!"

Ninian felt that the crisis was come, when he, and he alone, must unfold to this wronged woman the extent of her wrong. What that was, he was himself at present uncertain. One of two things must be the truth. Either the marriage was false, or he — the husband — wished her to believe it so. In any case he had deserted her.

"Rachel," said Ninian, trying to prepare her in some way, "this is a bitter trial for you. How can I help you?"

"Tell me, for I cannot quite understand what it is my husband means?"

"Nay, but what think you?"

"I cannot tell, my head is all strange. Perhaps on account of my disobeying him he is very angry. Still, I will have patience. I will follow him to the world's end, but he shall forgive me. He ought, for am I not his wife?"

"Show me," said Ninian, in as indifferent a manner as he could assume — "show me the marriage-acknowledgment which you told me of."

"I have it not. Why do you weary me about it? I am not thinking of that now," she answered.

"You have it not! Where is it then? Tell me; I must know."

"My husband has it."

Ninian looked aghast. Even Rachel, unsuspicious as she was, saw something in his countenance that terrified her. He had the presence of mind to conceal his doubts, only saying, "Did you give the paper to him, or did he take it?"

"I gave it. I had no safe place to keep it in, and in whose possession ought it to be but in my husband's?"

"That is true, if he were an honourable man."

"If? You do not doubt that — you could not — you dared not! He may be angry with me, scorn, despise me, alas! no wonder; yet you see the thought has almost crushed me. He may even in his anger forsake me for a time, but if he were to deceive me in the lightest thing — mind, I say only in the lightest thing — it would drive me mad!"

"Keep calm, Rachel," said Ninian, gently; but she went on unheeding.

"For years I have believed in him, wholly, worshippingly; almost as I believed in God. If I could do so no more, I should believe in nothing either in earth or heaven; I should sink down — down — until devils clutched me and made me — oh, there is nothing so vile that I could not be made if I once lost faith in him!"

As she spoke her whole likeness changed — from weakness to strength, from paleness to the glow of fierce emotion; dazzling almost as youthful beauty. She looked her old self again, or even more glorious.

"It is false!" she said, walking the room stately and fair. "He may not be all perfect; I think" — and her voice faltered a little — "I think in some things he has not used me well; but that he should stoop to be that which you, by your cruel 'if,' implied, is utterly false — utterly impossible."

It was a piteous thing, and so Ninian thought it, to see that while she divined the fearful suspicions which as yet had not passed his lips, they seemed to awake in her no terror of the consequences to herself. She only felt the dread of doubting her husband, the agony of his being degraded in her eyes.

Mr. Græme knew not what to do. To tell the deceived girl what he himself believed to be the truth — that the marriage, if ever legal, was now rendered questionable by the fact that its sole proof was in the hands of the husband, who had, doubtless, destroyed it — seemed wasting idle words upon air. *She* would never believe that he was thus guilty. To hint at such a thing would only enrage her beyond all bounds. And after all, the man whom she loved thus passionately might not, could not, be such a villain. Ninian determined to run the chance, and until further evidence to pre-suppose Geoffrey Sabine all that Rachel believed.

"You must not be angry with me," he said deprecatingly. "We learn to distrust every one, we men of law. And you must remember I never knew anything of your husband."

"Oh, that you had! But you will, for I must find him out, and you must help me. If he wishes to renounce me he shall; it is his will, and I submit; but he must forgive me — see me once more — let me cling to his breast — and bid him farewell. If I could only

die, then and there, with his arms clasping me, and his face leaning over me! He never knew, and he never can know, how wildly I loved him — year by year — as a child, as a girl, as a woman, till at last I loved him as a wife. Ay, I am his wife! unworthy indeed, but still his wife!"

These words struggled out amid bitter moans, as, subdued in complete humility, she sat by the hearth, and gave way to a flood of tenderness and woe. Ninian marvelled to trace in her mien so much of feminine softness. It was for the last time. He never saw *the woman* in her again.

"There now," she said at last, drying her hot cheeks, and putting back her hair — "I am quite composed; it has done me good to weep, but I shall not weep again. I will bear my fate calmly, whatever it may be. Only I must once more see my husband. Advise me how I shall best find him!"

"Have you thought," answered Ninian, but gently, lest he might be venturing too far — "have you thought that possibly he wishes to avoid you? It seems like it."

Her face grew crimson, until the blush — alas! it was her last blush — passed away like her last tear. "I know it does," she replied, mournfully, "but that makes no difference; it might if I were only his betrothed, for I have some pride. His wife has another duty. If he is angry with me I must humble myself before him; if he is ashamed to own me I must tell him that I will hide myself from him, and trouble him no more. Any way I must see him."

"How can he be traced? Can you give me any clue? Did he ever speak of his parents, or friends?"

"No, no. I fancied they were either dead or estranged

from him. But I never asked — they were nothing to me. I only thought of him. Besides, even if my husband had told me anything of his history or affairs, what right have I to tell you?"

"None — except that otherwise all search is in vain — for I have not the slightest information concerning him. Unless you trust me, it is utterly impossible for me to aid you in any way."

"Oh, that is hard — very hard! Well, I will try to remember — that is, if I can do it without disobeying him — for the little he ever told me, he charged me to hold secret as death. Ay, and so I shall, except in this bitter emergency. Let me think."

She sat silent a minute, and then said: "He told me one day, that though he was poor then he might not be so always, for he was heir to his father's brother — an English baronet — who had a large estate. I laughed and called him 'Sir Geoffrey,' — then almost wept thinking how far I was beneath him — so he spoke no more of it, either then or at any other time."

"His father's brother," mused Ninian — "then the name would be the same — Sabine; but we could easily find out, if we had a list of English baronetcies. I have one at my office, I think. I will look to-morrow."

"To-morrow — I cannot wait! You forget how different your to-morrows are from mine! Could we go to-night? It is not late. I have strength for anything. Ah, be kind to me — let us go."

He had a pitying heart had Ninian Græme. Without a word, he prepared to start for Edinburgh. He unlocked the door, and called Mrs. Sedley. Her little figure arose from the foot of the stairs, where she had crouched, keeping watch for her beloved mistress.

Rachel was putting up her hair and tying on her bonnet, her hands shaking with excitement. "Don't hinder me, Jane. I am going to find him. I think I shall find him now. Are you ready, Mr. Græme?"

"Yes — but you are forgetting these." He pointed to the bank-notes, left strewn about the table.

Rachel's lips trembled. "I do not quite understand why he sent me money. He knew I had enough for my small needs. He is poor himself too, or was once."

"Still, you had better take charge of it."

Rachel held out her hand, but immediately drew back with a look of bitter pain. "No, no; I can't touch it! I wanted a line — only one line of tenderness, forgiveness, and he has sent me — money!" She said no more, but pulled her veil down and walked steadily from the house.

Ninian gave the notes into Jane Sedley's care. He felt that there was faithfulness in the woman. Without speaking, they both followed Rachel towards Edinburgh.

It was too late for any but a foot journey. Rachel walked on and on, mile after mile, never lingering — never pausing. She did not once speak or look towards Ninian. He offered her his assistance; but she refused, and kept on, step after step, with a sort of mechanical energy.

"Ah, sir — never mind me — look to her," cried the little old woman, whom he turned to help. "My poor mistress — this is the way she has been walking all day. On, on, never stopping either for meat, or drink, or rest. And even now little she thinks what is coming upon her. How is it all to end?"

"God knows!" said Ninian. "But you must not leave her."

"Mr. Græme — I had a child once, who had her coloured hair and eyes. I've nobody now. No, I shall never leave her!"

St. Giles's chimes were ringing twelve — the lights of the Old Town had all vanished; and the New Town looked ghostly and deserted, when the three reached Ninian's office. The old clerk who kept watch over the place came out, shading his flaring light, and thinking his master "daft." But even he looked grave when he saw the faces of the two women that followed Mr. Græme. It was evident they were come on a matter of life and death.

"Sit down, Rachel, sit down. Make her rest a minute, Mrs. Sedley."

Rest — to her! She kept walking about with quick, unnatural motion, only saying beseechingly, "The book — can you not find the book?"

It was a good while before he could do so, for he himself was somewhat agitated. He had rarely felt more strongly moved than when he gave the volume into Rachel's hands. She turned over page after page.

"I — I cannot see clearly; the lines swim."

"Sit down, poor girl!" he said once more; but her limbs refused to stir. He laid the book on the table, and she stood over him — her left hand clutching his chair.

"It will be at the beginning of the S.'s; S-a — you spell it thus, do you not, Rachel?"

She nodded. Her lips were all dry and dumb.

He looked over the page silently. "Are you quite sure of the name?" He felt her hard gasping breath on his cheek, but there was no articulate answer.

"— I may have passed it by; my mind is rather confused to-night. Look over the book with me!"

She leaned forward; her finger followed his down the pages, word by word, and line by line, to the end of the list.

The name of Sabine was not there.

Ninian expected to hear her fall in a swoon, but she never moved or uttered a sound. He saw her grasping the chair, her face rigid as that of a corpse which, the life being gone, slowly settles into calm.

"My poor Rachel, do you guess it now? Or must I tell you?"

Her eyes slowly turned upon him. He was terrified by their utter listlessness. He felt that unless roused by some great shock she would die where she stood.

"Listen," said he firmly, so as to stir her into some life by the shock. "This man has doubtless been deceiving you all along. Either his story or his name must be false, and whether the marriage was true or not, he has taken away all proof of it. Do you understand now, my poor girl?"

"She doesn't understand — not one word," whispered Jane Sedley, plucking at Mr. Græme's sleeve. "Leave her, sir, just one minute, and let me speak to you. D'ye see this?" And she held out to him a scrap of paper whereon were written a few lines in an evidently feigned and awkward hand.

"What is it?"

"I'm not quite clear, sir, though I can guess. But it came from *him*, and I durst not show it her, she took on so about the money. Read it, Mr. Græme, please."

Ninian read it, and shuddered in the reading. Then he glanced at the unhappy girl, whose death-warrant —

nay, the doom of worse than death — was now in his hand. Even his firm spirit quailed at the thought of what he had to communicate.

"It is a cruel — wicked thing, God knows! And He will assuredly punish it."

"Amen!" said faithful Jane Sedley; and the little withered face grew almost grand in its denunciation. "That means, sir, that my poor young mistress is —"

"Hush, look at her!"

They might well look. She had stirred from her motionless posture, and turned her face towards them. It was like that of a person rising out of a cataleptic trance, in which, though the body seemed dead, the senses and perceptions were awake. She had evidently heard all that passed. She did not speak, but her eyes were fixed upon the paper with a horrible stare, and there was a quivering in her fingers as if she wished to take it.

"Let her!" said Jane Sedley; "let her read and know what a villain he is; then, maybe, she'll forget him."

Ninian also judged it best that with her own eyes she should read her fate. He placed the letter in her hand, but in vain; her poor burning eyeballs seemed to have no power to discern the words.

"Shall I read it?" said Ninian, feeling that somehow or other the truth must be told. Rachel assented.

Thus the paper ran: — "'If the woman, Rachel Armstrong, calling herself my wife, should persist in so doing, I hereby declare that what she chooses to consider a marriage was a mere jest to ease her conscience. She is not my wife, and I never will acknowledge her as such. It is useless for her to seek me, as she knows nothing of me — not even my true name; and I would

advise her to forget she ever heard one which has really no existence, that of G. S.'"

"My mistress, my mistress!" cried Jane Sedley, and darted forward to her aid.

But Rachel never stirred. Slowly, slowly, the lids fell over her wide-open glassy eyes; her hand dropped at her side; she shivered all over like one who through death-throes passes into a new existence. This lasted a few minutes, and then she stood upright.

"Come, let us go!" Words clear, distinct, spoken in a voice natural, yet most unnatural, as it were another woman speaking, and not Rachel. She moved across the room steadily. She even turned back a little way to hold out her hand to Ninian; it felt like a dead hand, so nerveless, so icy cold.

"Let me go with you; or else will you come to The Gowans?" No answer.

"It is better not, sir," Jane Sedley added, as she prepared to follow. "Leave her to me: I know a place where I can take her to, and where she will be safe and quiet."

"Where is it?"

"I'll come and tell you to morrow."

Ninian accompanied them to the door only. The last he saw of Rachel was as she stood under the lamplight, gazing with stern, hard, unblenching face into the black, black night.

CHAPTER XIV.

A PLEASANT thing is a family letter — a great epistolatory nosegay, made up of all sorts of flowers. Ninian sat rejoicing over one of these, a fortnight or so after he had established himself in solitude at The Gowans. For, since that night when Rachel re-appeared at Musselburgh, he had felt that he was scarce welcome there. Nor could he breathe to any living soul the tragedy of that poor forlorn one's story.

She came and vanished, leaving no trace behind. Day after day Mr. Græme waited, expecting to hear some tidings; but in vain. She never appeared more. He sent to the village where Jane Sedley lived. The old woman had been there, given up her cottage, and gone away. This was some satisfaction: for as long as the faithful creature was alive, Rachel would never be altogether deserted. To all other intents and purposes she was as one dead. Every hope of finding her seemed vain. So she disappeared — one more human being lost in the wide desert of the world. None had any right over her, or yearning after her; even Ninian, as amidst his many cares, the thought of her gradually ebbed from his mind, could only say, with a pitying regret, "Poor thing, God help her, for none else can!"

Nevertheless, he left no search untried, and snatched at every possibility, near or remote, which might discover, or bring help to Rachel Armstrong. And never did he think of her but he thanked God for his own tender

ones, safe under his care, to whom no harm could come, and to whose nest the foot of wickedness should never approach.

He sat smiling over their letters — a most heterogeneous handful — reading them one after the other, quite unable to make up his mind as to which was the most interesting. The most prominent, at all events, was Tinie's large, dashing, back-sloped hand — the most extraordinary hand for a little fairy like her to write; unless, as her sister said, she had acquired it by mimicking the Professor's. Her letter was as eccentric as its caligraphy:

"My darling Brother,

"You're a horrid creature, and you know it! You don't deserve a line, and yet I am going to write you a dozen or two, because I'm very lazy, and stupid, and cross. Our Sister won't let me go for a walk this morning with the boys, and the Professor, and Mr. Ulverston. I do believe she thinks I'm falling in love with the latter; and I have a great mind to do it, if only to vex her. Ah, no! Poor dear sister Lindsay! even if she does go clucking after us wild young chickens, like any old hen: she keeps us warm under her wings.

"Brother, you can't think what fun we are having. Such walking — such boating — such driving — for Mr. Ulverston has got a carriage down here. He is the very nicest young man that ever was born, and has such a bonnie bit of a moustache, which he twirls about in this fashion whenever he does the sentimental to us girls."

(Here followed a pen-and-ink sketch that sent Ninian into a hearty fit of laughter. But it made him easy on

one point: that the fair caricaturist was not likely to be in love with her "subject.")

"That's rather like his handsome phiz — isn't it? Couldn't you wear a moustache, now, brother Ninian? I suppose you think they wouldn't suit the W. S. face? Nor the Professor's either, though I have tried hard to coax him to it. He and 'Desdichado' — we call him Desdichado, or the Disinherited Knight, from a story he told us about some cousin turning up and stepping in between him and a title, though he has got the estate still, lucky fellow! — well the Professor took Desdichado to live with him at Helensburgh. Even Dr. Reay is enchanted by this all-conquering knight. In fact, we are every one of us, from Lindsay downwards, in love with Mr. Ulverston. When he really 'gangs awa,' it will be the old story of Willie and the lassies o' Melville Castle:

> 'The cries o'them brought Willie back
> Ere he'd been lang awa';
> "Oh lassies, bide till I come back,
> An' faith I'll wed ye a'." '

"— Here's Hope peeping over my shoulder with her long face. 'Tinie, dear, will your brother like such wild jests?'

"Who cares! There never was such a stupid lassie as that lassie! When we are all laughing with Desdichado (if he did but know I had christened him so!), there she sits in a corner, with her solemn face, that never changes except to grow the colour of a peony.

"I forgot to tell you that Edmund sends his love, and will write next time. He has grown very sentimental of late, and written oceans of poetry. One on a falling leaf, Hope is now sitting copying out for Mr.

Ulverston; and as it's rather long I suspect her letter to you will be short. But Desdichado wanted it to send to-night to a London periodical — (fancy Edmund's pride!) — and he would have it in Hope's hand, which he said was neater than mine. The wretch!

"Ha, felicity! There they are, boys and all, down on the beach. I will take a hop skip and jump through the window, and be off in spite of Our Sister. 'Here, Hope, is a blank page — take the pen and finish.' Good-by, my darling, best, sweetest, most good-for-nothing of brothers.

"Your own
"TINIE."

Here, creeping meekly in under Tinie's flourishes, was the delicate writing that Ninian himself had tried to form out of Hope's pointed school-girl scrawl. And she had taken such pains to please him! He almost fancied her little face looking up full of anxiety, or her pleasant laugh as he praised her and told her she would soon write well enough for him to hire her as a copying-clerk:

"DEAR MR. GRÆME,

"Tinie thought I should not write much, but I shall. How could I neglect you for anybody? We are all very happy, but we do not forget you; and I am sure I hope you are not very dull all alone by yourself at The Gowans. It is getting quite autumnal weather now, and Lindsay greatly wishes to be at home. I think, indeed, she would be happier if you would send for us to come back, though Tinie and the twins do not like the idea of leaving their beloved Gare-Loch. I love it

too; I am perfectly happy here; but Lindsay ought to be considered before any one.

"Tinie said I might read over her letter, lest we should both tell you the same news. You must not mind her nonsense. She is very good, I can assure you, and a great deal wiser than she makes herself out to be. So clever too! I am afraid you will find my letter very stupid after hers; and I cannot think of anything worth saying, or at least worth saying to you. —

"— I had to break off here — for Ruth and Esther being gone a walk, Lindsay wanted me to make the pudding. I am growing a thorough little housekeeper, you see, under her instructions. I should be able to take better care of you now than I did when Lindsay was ill, and your sisters away. I cannot write more, for they are all coming in to dinner. I hope you are quite well now. Lindsay said, after you were gone, that you had not been well; how wrong of me not to notice it! Dear Mr. Græme, believe me, your affectionate friend (here the word 'little' was afterwards inserted before 'friend,' as if she thought the signature not respectful enough),

"HOPE ANSTED."

Heaven knows how many simple letters of simple-minded women have been kissed, cherished, or wept over by men far above themselves. Therefore it was no marvel that the childish epistle of Hope Ansted was read and re-read with lingering eyes and a throbbing heart. So it will always be to the end of time. It is a lesson worth learning by those young creatures who seek to lure by their accomplishments, or dazzle by their genius, that though he may admire, no man ever

loves a woman for these things. He loves her for what is essentially distinct from, though not positively incompatible with them — her woman's nature and her woman's heart. That is why we so often see a man pass by the De Staëls and the Corinnes, to take into his bosom some wayside flower who has nothing on earth to make her worthy him, except that she is, what so few of your "female celebrities" are — a true woman.

Ninian, even while laughing over his sister's epistle, had been somewhat chafed therewith; but Hope's letter came like balm. He read it many times over, with a satisfied sense of her innocent tenderness. Better have that than nothing! He took it — all he dared take or try to win — and was thankful. Perhaps sometimes despite his will, the vague hope would arise that the whirl of coming years might throw some blessings on his path. But he knew he must not think of that; the present was enough.

There was one more letter, in Lindsay's small old-fashioned hand — she had been educated ere penny-post days introduced the epistolary mania. Ninian knew it was a trouble to her to write a letter, and that she never did so except on rare and earnest occasions:

"My Dear Brother,

"I write these few lines while the children are in bed, to say that if it quite suits you, I rather wish we could come home. The children would be better at their studies again — do you not think so? — Edmund especially. I am a little anxious over the boy. He is very quiet and dull. He will scarcely notice any one but Hope; and he sits and looks at her by the hour together. It is almost ridiculous in me to have such

notions, but I am half afraid he is falling in love with Hope. In his light, boyish way I mean; but he may soon get over it. She does not even perceive it, the innocent child. Still it makes me uneasy about my dear boy.

"And Tinie is rather thoughtless in the matter of Mr. Ulverston, who, I fear, cannot consider her such a well-behaved young lady as Ninian Græme's sister ought to be. In spite of her wild letter, you need not be afraid; we shall not have the place of Mr. MacCallum taken by Mr. Ulverston. He is an agreeable young man. I once thought he admired Hope, for he asked a great deal about her, her family and circumstances, and of course I answered him; but he has taken little notice of her since. Oh! what trouble these young people are!

"It was very kind of you to let Miss Reay remain in our house, and the Professor was much gratified. I hope you are well, and that Katie makes you comfortable. Tell Katie, I wish that before we return she would take down the muslin curtains and put up the green moreen, &c., &c."

But with this domestic phase in Miss Græme's correspondence we stop, as Ninian did.

He pondered long over his sister's letter; it had made him anxious. He left his solitary breakfast, always too early for the appearance of Miss Reay, and walked two or three times up and down his beloved garden, before he could quite recover his equanimity. Then he came in, and wrote a "General Epistle," full of his own grave jokes and queer sayings, winding up by a loving summons to his household to come home. The time thus fixed was a week sooner than he had at first intended;

but he reconciled it to himself as being Lindsay's desire and Hope's. At least, Hope did not say she would be unwilling to return. But still that line of hers — "I am perfectly happy here" — jarred on his remembrance. Alas! did any of us weak loving ones ever gladly hear that the beloved had been "perfectly happy" where we were not? It matters not how we disguise it, we are all selfish at the core; but those for whom we err and suffer ought to be patient and merciful with us, as Heaven is. One day we shall learn to love all purely and without selfish sorrow, even as do the angels.

Ninian at last received his wanderers home. It was a blithe returning; as all seemed to feel when they drew the curtains close, and Ninian, having vacated his arm-chair for the sake of the wearied Lindsay, came and sat in the midst of them. Tinie leaned against his knee, to the manifest disquiet of his pet cat, who seemed to have a grim foreboding that the peaceful solitude of The Gowans was now ended. Hope, by a sort of tacit habit, came to Ninian's other side. He heard her say, with a sort of happy sigh,

"Ah, how pleasant it is to be at home!"

The innocent words thrilled him with an infinite joy, that blotted out everything except the present day — the present hour. He was his own cheerful self once more, such as he had rarely been at the Gare-Loch. He kept his brothers and sisters in a state of perpetual merriment, until Tinie remarked, with a comical dimple at the corner of her mouth, and a sly glance at her younger brothers, that he was almost as amusing as Desdichado himself.

"And what has become of the valorous Desdichado? I declare I had quite forgotten him. Come, Tinie,

tell me what sort of a farewell you took of your knight."

"My knight!" said Tinie, with a positive, undoubted blush. "Do not be stupid, brother Ninian."

"Well, everybody's knight, since you will not acknowledge him. Where was he left?"

"He has gone to Fingal's Cave with the Professor," said Tinie. "Perhaps he may return through Edinburgh, on his way to London, where he will settle for the winter. Was not that what he said, Hope?"

"I really don't remember. He never talked much to me, you know," was Hope's answer, with a quiet, indifferent air. And Ninian, who had turned quickly round to watch her, turned back again smiling. It was very odd, such an anxious brother as he was, — that in this matter he never thought of or noticed Tinie.

When he had sent his little flock to bed, and sat musing in his study, he was perfectly startled by the apparition of his youngest sister, in a very demure face and a white dressing-gown.

"You nonsensical brother! You took me for a ghost, did you?" cried she, utterly unable to resist her inclination to laugh; then trying to recollect herself, she assumed a countenance of grave importance, which produced an effect still more comical.

"Nay, lassie, the nonsense is on your side. You ought to have been asleep by this time. Come, my little spectre, what's the reason that you walk the night in this unseemly fashion? Do you want more kisses? I thought I gave you the prescribed number before you went away."

"Ay, that you did. You made all the rest jealous,

especially Hope. She said she could not imagine why she did not get even one."

"Indeed! Well, I will remember the child to-morrow," said Ninian, with a faint attempt to laugh. "But now, if that is all you had to say, go you to bed — quick! You look quite tired; almost as white as a real ghost."

"I dare say I do. I have had a great deal to trouble me to-day."

Her comically-pathetic voice made Ninian laugh in earnest this time. "I beg your pardon, Tinie, if there is anything really the matter; but I can hardly believe it, when you are, as the children say, 'laughing with your mouth, and crying with your eyes!'"

"I'm not laughing, and I'm not crying. I am sure I thought you would call me a very good girl for coming to tell you this."

"To tell me what?" said Ninian, rather more seriously.

"It isn't my fault, I assure you, brother. I can't help it, if these things will happen."

"What has happened?"

"Nothing very terrible. You need not look so frightened. Only — please do not be angry — but — but — Mr. Ulverston made love to me yesterday."

This melancholy confession being delivered with a solemn, penitential air, Tinie heaved a great sigh of relief, and sat down with the look of a person who has done an unpleasant duty, and expects to be much praised for the same. She was considerably surprised when Ninian, after a slight start, and a muttered ejaculation that sounded very like "Confound him!" — relapsed into perfect silence. In fact, he was completely puzzled.

With all his brotherly forethought and watchful observation, he had never for a moment contemplated such a possibility as this.

Tinie began to look disappointed. "Well, brother, have you not a word to say? I thought you would be pleased with me for coming to tell you this at once," she said, with a little spirit of mischief twinkling in her eyes.

"Pleased! of course I am — with your candour, I mean. But I am so amazed. This is the last thing I should ever have expected."

"Indeed!" answered the little coquette, with the faint shadow of a pout. "I do not see anything so very wonderful in it. Perhaps you think, as Lindsay seems to do, that nobody would admire any of us when Hope was by."

Her chance finger touched a quivering string; he *had* thought so. With something like self-reproach, though for what he hardly knew, he drew his sister to him, and put his arm round her neck.

"Do not be a foolish lassie. I suppose you expect your brother to feel very proud of the awful amount of admiration you get. But what if he should be jealous too?"

"Ah, that's delicious!" cried Tinie, with her immemorial clap of the hands, which showed she had gained exactly what she wanted. And then, with an after-thought, she tried to subside into the bashful propriety necessary on the occasion. It rather deceived Ninian as to the real state of the case.

"Come, my dear," said he, gravely, "we must not jest now; you must tell me more. Am I to understand" — and his old tenderness over his pet gave a regretful

tone to his voice — "am I do understand that a second suitor wishes immediately to carry away my wee sister from me?"

"He did not exactly say that," stammered Tinie, who, with all her vagaries, was a truthful little thing.

"Then, what did he say? That is — if you have no objection to tell me."

"Oh dear no! not the least. He said 'that I was a lively little angel, and he was a lonely, miserable man, and he did not know how he should ever endure existence after parting from me;' and — and — all that sort of thing. You know!"

"Really," answered Ninian, unable to repress a smile. "I am not exactly *au fait* in 'that sort of thing.'"

"Of course not. Nobody ever suspected you, my wise brother. But you said I must tell you if anything — that is, if anybody — were again to —"

"To try and steal my little sister's heart. Well — is it stolen?"

"How can you talk of such a thing!" cried Tinie, laughing and blushing. She certainly was the most wayward little creature in the world. Ninian felt his patience begin to ebb.

"I do not like quite so much jesting, Tinie. Tell me seriously, did Mr. Ulverston propose to you, or did he merely repeat the sentimental nothings that seem to have kept such a fast hold of your memory?"

"Now, that's very hard! I do just as you desire me, and tell you all people say to me, and then you're cross. I don't understand such treatment, brother Ninian. I am sure Mr. Ulverston would be a great deal more kind to me than you."

"Are you then in earnest?" said Ninian, with a vague alarm. "And do you really think this man is in earnest too?"

"I do not know, and I do not care, except that you might be a little more polite to your friend than to call him 'this man.'"

The brother had gone rather too far. He had awakened a certain feminine vanity, which did not like its conquest to be decried or doubted.

"I cannot tell how it is, Tinie, but these love affairs seem to produce a jarring between you and me. We were a great deal happier when you were still a child, and did not meddle with such matters. Forgive me if I vex you in any way — I only desire to see you good and happy."

"My dear brother!" She seemed touched, and put up her face to kiss him.

"Now, my pet, being friends again, will you hear what I have to say?"

Tinie sat down on the floor, and folded her hands with a very humble and demure look.

"Of course," he said, "you cannot help being bonnie and lively; nor that other people admire you besides your brother. I don't want to monopolise you, my lassie in fact, I suppose I will have to resign you altogether some of those days. But still I had rather not resign you to Mr. Ulverston."

"Why not? Though, mind, I never said I should ask you. Still, why not?"

"Because I think he is too light and thoughtless — too much like Tinie herself, in short. When I give her up out of my care, it should be into that of some one a good deal graver and older than herself."

"Oh, indeed. Thank you!" The little head was turned away, and her fingers began picking the worsted out of a darn — not the only one, alas! — on Ninian's study-carpet.

"Besides, though I know nothing evil of Mr. Ulverston, there is a certain something about him that I cannot quite like. I suppose it is the Irish nature in him — I mean the bad half of Irish nature, for there is a good half too. He may not be insincere, but he is evidently changeable as the wind. From his conversation, I suspect he has said the same thing that he said to you to half a dozen girls, and may to half a dozen more. I should be very sorry for my wee sister to believe him or love him, and perhaps to break her little heart about him."

"She wouldn't break her heart, indeed; and she does not love him, or anybody, but her own brother — the nicest and best brother that ever was born," cried Tinie, as she jumped on Ninian's knee (a throne divided between her and the cat), and very nearly smothered him with caresses. Truly this warm sisterly love would have covered a multitude of Tinie's little sins.

"So then —"

"'We will proceed no further in this business,'" said Ninian, with one of his mock-tragic quotations from his favourite poet, always a sign that he was in high good humour. "If Mr. Ulverston comes to Edinburgh, why — well! if not, why — well too!"

"Well — better — best, I think," whispered Tinie, merrily.

"Therefore we need not talk any more about him. But," added Ninian, with a sudden thought, "have you told any one of this?"

"No, indeed! not even Hope. She scolded me so — at least not scolded, but seemed so shocked about the other affair. I wouldn't have her know on any account."

It was one of the curious contradictions of the human mind, that Ninian almost wished that Hope had known of Mr. Ulverston's lovemaking to Tinie.

"And, my dear, you are sure no one noticed these attentions and pretty speeches of his?"

"No one — except, perhaps, the Professor, who was behind us at the time. If he heard, I dare say he thought me a very foolish girl."

"Most likely he never thought about the matter at all. People of his age and pursuits 'canna be fashed' with listening or attending to the affairs of wild lassies like you."

"Indeed! Well, I care not!"

The rather sulky tone struck Ninian; but he did not give it a second thought. He was just then considering whether he had not judged Mr. Ulverston too harshly. And as he patted and stroked the dainty head that lay on his shoulder, he thought that such blithe sweetness might well have won anybody, and possibly the wooing was in earnest after all. However, he said nothing, but determined to let things take their own course. Still he must have good proof that Mr. Ulverston was worthy, before he ever resigned his pet sister.

For some minutes he made himself a patient martyr to Tinie's caresses; not that he did not like them — for her affection had been always very sweet to him — the more so, as he, of all the family, chiefly engrossed it. But in their long absence, and in the various strange moods and struggles of this year, all home affections

seemed to have loosened from him in some slight degree, or from their imperceptible sweetness to have grown into perceptible duties. And somehow love is best when not even self-conscious; when it lives in us as invisible and unfelt as our heart's pulse, or the breath we draw.

With a mingling of many feelings, in which a vague compunction was not the least, Ninian leaned his head upon his sister's, and was silent. Her little tongue ran on the while fast and merry, until at last through very weariness she ceased, and he tried to send her off to bed. She had reached the door — when she came back again.

"Just one word, brother. You are quite sure you are not cross with me?"

"Not a jot, my wee thing!"

"And, supposing the Professor did over-hear the nonsense Mr. Ulverston said, you'll try and make him understand that I'm not quite so foolish as he thinks me, but mean to be a very good child and — go on with my studies. You'll tell him that, won't you?"

"I'll tell anybody anything you like if you'll only go to bed."

Immediately the white vision vanished, and was seen no more.

CHAPTER XV.

THE household fell into its old ways. Every one at The Gowans seemed to carry a blithe heart and a cheerful countenance except Edmund.

The boy was struggling with the restlessness and melancholy peculiar to all young minds, especially to those of fine and rare order. He moped about for days together, doing nothing; or else lay reading, his choice being principally that wild poetry of passion and emotion so attractive in early life, of which every young Rasselas tries to make himself wings to soar out of the Happy Valley of childhood into manhood's stormy world. Now and then, this excitement ceasing, poor Edmund used to roam about the garden the very picture of despair, frightening his sister Lindsay with his pale face, his expressions of dire woe, and his dark hints that "he knew he should make an end of himself some time."

We smile at these vagaries as we grow older, and contemplate with much amusement the numbers of worthy middle-aged individuals, cheerful, respectable authors, or hard-working men of business, — merry old bachelors, or happy fathers of families, — all of whom were in their youth the wretchedest of mortals, talking perpetually of "misery" and "self-destruction." It seems ridiculous now, but it was awfully real at the time. It is no more than a phase of mind which almost every one goes through (except those worthies untroubled with

any brains at all, who generally pass through life quite comfortably, and are the most "jolly" people imaginable). But for those others, who must meet and endure this bitter ordeal, they should be dealt with tenderly, and borne with patiently, until the trouble ends. It is the portion of all finer natures; the restless want — the vague aspiring; the perpetually striving for perfection in poetic dreamings — in idle love-fancies, inconstant as air, each seeking after something diviner or more beautiful, which is never found in knowledge, or in frenzied dissipation; all alike ending in nothing, until the only truth of life seems to be that bitterest one of Solomon the Preacher — "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity!"

This is, perhaps, the story of every human mind in which shines one spark of the fire of genius; the story's beginning — but, thank God! not necessarily its end. Many a great, strong spirit has passed — and all can pass — out of the cloudy void into a clear day.

It was unfortunate that there chanced to be no one to hold out such comfort unto poor young Edmund, bewildering himself amidst the troublous maze. Unhappy he was, yet not knowing why; fancying himself in love, trying to shape every fair face or graceful mind into the image of his fancy; and as each faded by turns — ay, even Hope — into the mere likeness of ordinary girlhood, becoming disgusted with them, himself, and the whole world. At last, when "Edmund's fickleness," and "Edmund's new sweethearts," became a general family jest, the poor fellow lost somewhat of his gentle temper, and was growing fast into a juvenile misanthrope.

Then the elder brother stepped in to the rescue. He would have done so long before, but that he really did not quite understand the boy. Nature moulds her

children so differently. Ninian's manly, self-dependent character could scarcely conceive the almost feminine vacillation, sensitiveness, and weakness, with which Edmund had to contend. But this he saw, that something was amiss, and that a change was necessary in the boy's life. The old scheme now laid aside for months — the London journey — was once more projected.

And, as if all good angels were smoothing away obstacles to the fulfilment of the boy's sickly longing, the sole remaining objection of Ninian and Lindsay was overruled by a sudden announcement made by Professor Reay. Kenneth walked into The Gowans one evening, sat as usual by the hearth in his silent, absent way, for an hour or two, and then observed:

"I am come to say good-by. I am not going to live in Edinburgh any longer."

The household were all struck dumb except Tinie who burst into a fit of laughter so wild, that at the end of it she looked quite pale and exhausted.

"Yes, I am really leaving," said Kenneth Reay, in answer to the throng of questions. "I have asked and obtained an appointment in one of the two London Colleges; and I go there next week."

This was all the information he gave, and nothing more could be got out of him. But in the gossip of the womenkind together, it was discovered that the appointment was a highly lucrative one, and that the Professor had been lured into changing his old house for a goodly establishment in the metropolis, to be placed, with his unfortunate self, under the superintendence of Miss Reay.

"Ah, Ninian!" hinted the anxious elder sister, "I think my dear boy would be safe there. Otherwise, I

never dare let him go." So with her gentleness and perseverance, she managed to smooth away all difficulties, and the matter was settled. For Edmund, though in his state of sublime melancholy and indifference he made believe to take no heed of the preparations for his benefit, yet evidently enjoyed all. He roused himself sufficiently to collect his favourite books; and now and then was heard to expatiate on various literary introductions promised aforetime by Mr. Ulverston, who, however, with his usual Hibernian obliviousness, had from Fingal's Cave disappeared, and been heard of no more.

Happy little Tinie! — well for her she had such a merry untouched heart! She never "wore the willow" at all; it was a tree that did not grow in her garden. She was the very first of the family to forget Mr. Ulverston and his perfections.

The time was talked of for Edmund's departure. "He must stay over Hogmanay, we couldn't have a happy new year without Edmund," was the general exclamation, as if all felt there was a certain sadness in this first breaking of the family bond. The boy himself seemed to feel it least, dazzled as he was by the splendour of his own secret dreams.

"You are not anxious about him now, Lindsay?" said Ninian. "He is as satisfied as ever he can be; he will not break his heart for Hope or for any one."

Lindsay smiled, with a puzzled air. She had troubled herself in vain over the ins and outs of Edmund's variable affections, until at last she gave up the matter in despair. "Yes, brother, I suppose you are right."

"I knew it would be so. Boys' loves generally pass

away like morning clouds," Ninian continued. (Perhaps he spoke from experience; most men could.) "Besides, it was not his first affair. Once upon a time — except for the utter ridiculousness of the thing — I fancied he was ready to 'go daft' after Rachel. Yet now he has quite forgotten her. He scarcely even seemed to care when he knew she had gone away, and that we should not see her any more."

"Poor Rachel! she was a strange creature; I am rather glad she never took to any of the girls," answered Lindsay, who knew Mrs. Forsyth's version of the story and no more. But she saw a sorrowful compassion on Ninian's face; so was silent. Just then some invisible household-sprite had whispered in her ear that the Hogmanay-cake in the oven *might* be burning; which caused her to vanish immediately towards the inferior regions.

That day — the last of the Old Year — Ninian returned early from his office.

"Edmund, I hear that you must positively be off with the Professor on January 2nd, and as we will have no doleful preparations on New Year's Day, bring your books, and I'll help you to pack this afternoon."

Edmund said he had been busy about that duty for four days; but as his peculiar notion of packing appeared to be taking books from one side of the room and strewing them over the other, his elder brother's offer was by no means so unnecessary as the boy seemed at first to think. So they both shut themselves up in Ninian's study for an hour.

"Are you two never coming? We are all ready in the parlour, and Lindsay has sent me to fetch you," said

a voice, preceded by a gentle knock, which marked it to belong to the only one who ever paid the deference of knocking at Mr. Græme's study door. He looked up, smiling.

"Come in, Hope — ay, that's right. Why, what a bonnie sight you are!"

She was indeed. She had on an evening-dress of white, that neat attire the prettiness of which ought to console maidens of light purse for all the finery in the world. A spray or two of glossy-leaved, red-berried holly was fastened in her hair. Her arms and neck shone through the thin muslin; in her usual close home-costume no one had ever seen how round and white they were. She looked so bright — so happy — so innocently proud of herself; it was indeed

"A sure cure for sad eyes
To gaze upon her face."

Ninian paused in his work. He was kneeling beside the box, in the midst of a heterogeneous heap of books, plaster casts, &c. His appearance was not the most elegant, he being *minus* his coat, with his hands all covered with dust, and his curly hair, one of the few perfections he had, tossed about in the wildest confusion.

"Well — do you like me? Am I bonnie to-night?" said Hope, merrily. "And we are all dressed the same, just like sisters. We have stolen the prettiest holly-branches in your garden, Mr. Græme; and you will have the pleasure of seeing them in our hair. Look!"

She came closer, and put her head on one side to show him.

"Very nice. There, turn round, and let me admire

you; nay, don't be afraid, my white bird, I shall not touch your snowy feathers with these hands," said Ninian, smiling. But while he smiled, there came unwittingly a bitter sense of contrast between this fairy creature and himself. He could not bear to see her shrink from him, even in play.

"Now, fly away, birdie; you seem, indeed, just ready to fly, on some sort of wings or other. You scarcely belong to us of the work-a-day world."

"I don't quite know what you mean. Are you not pleased with me? I thought you would be."

"And thought rightly, my little Hope. But run away: you see Edmund has gone to dress already. He vanished like a ghost."

"Of course! His latest sweetheart is coming to tea to-night."

Ninian stooped over his packing. Somehow he did not like to hear her jest about such things. "I will have done directly, Hope; do not let me detain you here."

"But I like to be detained," said Hope, balancing her little figure on the arm of a chair. "I shall stay and watch you."

"A pretty sight for a fair lady's eyes — am I not, now? I know you are half afraid lest some one might come in and find me thus; then how ashamed you would be of your guardian."

"Ashamed, because he was a kind brother, giving himself all sorts of trouble and disagreeable work to please Edmund? No!" she added, energetically, "I had rather see you there, with your grimed hands and face — ay, there is actually a black mark on your face, too — than look at the finest gentleman in a ball-room!"

"Would you, Hope? Would you, dear child?"

"And to show you that I am not alarmed for my finery, and don't mind coming near you and touching you, as you thought I should — look here!"

She came, stepping over the chaos of rubbish; sat down in her white dress on the old box, and laid her two hands in Ninian's; — hers seeming by the contrast so soft, white, and small. He looked at them and at her face, — then closed his eyes. He felt the rising of one of those storms of almost uncontrollable passion, which women can scarcely understand, but which this man, whose love was at once so tender and so strong, had to fight with day by day.

"What is the matter with you, Mr. Græme?" cried Hope, her merry smiles fading.

"I am dizzy — with stooping, perhaps. Wait a minute — never mind."

He sat down on the floor, leaning his arm against the box, and laying his head upon it.

"How you have tired yourself! You should not, indeed. And that naughty boy Edmund has left you so much to do still. Come, let me help you. I should be so glad to help you in anything."

"Should you, with those hands? How tiny they are and soft!" He took them, played with them a little, and then — he could not have helped it had it been at his life's price — he stooped and crushed his lips upon them, wildly and long.

Hope looked amazed, and something of a womanly blush dawned in her innocent face. Ninian rose.

"So, you *exigeante* damsel, you can't want more. You make even your staid guardian turn into a '*preux chevalier*,' and kiss your hand, — kneeling, too, I declare.

A pity there was nobody here to see the exhibition! But come, vanish! or I will turn you out."

She laughed, still blushing slightly, and ran away. Ninian walked to the door — fastened it — then staggered back, and lay on the floor where he had sat with the child close near. There was beside him a holly leaf, which had fallen out of her hair. He snatched it — the sharp thorns bruised his lips, but he kissed it still, in the very madness of a boy.

There was now a whole chorus of voices at his door. He must be once more Ninian Græme in his calmness, his gravity, his elder brotherhood of more than thirty years.

When the Last Day comes, and the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed, how some of us will shudder, and wonder, and weep! — how, if a few hypocrites we knew may then appear black and ghastly through the rendings of their fair disguise — there will be others — alas! deceivers likewise; since when they walked with us we knew them but as ordinary people fulfilling their round of little pleasures and little cares; liked and disliked, while we praised and blamed them, as our fancy led. But, knowing them at last truly, we shall in That Day learn, with marvel and with awe, that some of Heaven's chiefest saints and martyrs were not greater than they.

Hogmanay was this year kept in grander style than it had ever been celebrated in the Græme family. Still, fits of dulness came over them now and then — at least over Lindsay, who watched her boy with eyes from which all her struggles could not sometimes drive back the tears. Edmund too was rather grave — the girls said because his "last sweetheart" had not made her ap-

pearance. But Ninian knew him better than that. They two had had a long talk together over the book-packing, and every look the boy cast on his elder brother showed how deeply and tenderly Ninian's words had fallen on his softened heart.

"Nay, no dreariness to-night, children," said Mr. Græme. "If we are to dance the New Year in, we must begin in earnest. Come, Edmund, lead off with Hope, and Tinie, here's my great ugly paw, if your ladyship will accept it? Strike up, Lindsay."

Lindsay, whose proficiency in dance music was a merit not light, since she had learnt it, only for the children's pleasure, having for it a little liking and less ear, struck up accordingly, and played until her fingers ached.

"Now for a reel, for which the twins seem quite ready — Tinie scorns it, I understand."

"That's Mr. Ulverston's teaching," scowled Reuben. "Well, if people must make fools of themselves by dancing at all, the best thing is to do it thoroughly. So here goes for a reel."

And, despite his contemptuous condescension, the young cynic was very soon snapping his fingers, and grinning widely with delight as he executed the convolutions and whirls of that merriest of all dances, which, as executed by Esther and Ruth, sonsie lassies, light, strong, and well-matched, was a performance remarkable for grace as well as spirit.

Ninian and the Professor, whose "week" had somehow extended to the miraculous length of fifteen days, leaned against the mantelpiece and looked on; the latter beginning to discourse on the probable origin of Scotch

reels, and Gælic dances in especial, including the Sword-dance and Gillie Callum.

"Ah! you'll show me the Sword-dance, Professor? I do so want to learn it. You know you said you could dance it when you were a boy," cried Tinie, who had flitted round and round about her brother and Dr. Reay. "You cannot refuse, when you are going away the day after to-morrow," she added, with a little — a very little piteousness of face, which was doubled and trebled on that of Kenneth. He yielded at once.

Whereupon Miss Christina took the poker and tongs, and laid them crosswise on the floor, and actually coaxed the Professor's unwieldly feet into antics indescribable, performed between the interstices of the fire-irons. After which she pushed him away and began to mimic the same herself. Hope stood by, quite absorbed in the amusement, and laughing heartily.

Ninian went and sat in his arm-chair. He watched them all for a time with his cheerful smile. Gradually his hand fell over his eyes, and he sunk into deep thought. No one noticed him. They went on dancing; even Hope's quiet English blood being stirred into excitement by the mirth of the moment. He saw her floating among his younger brothers and sisters; he heard her laugh, softer, but almost as gay as Tinie's.

"Ay," he murmured to himself, "'*Tis better as it is*,' as my good friend *Othello* says. It might in the end be like the story of the white rose tree — the one she admired — which I was so foolish as to keep in my dark study. Of course it pined and would not grow. I had better have put it out into the sunny garden, and seen it only now and then; *it* at least would then have been happy. And so will she, my bonnie white rose!"

There was a hand on his shoulder, and Edmund stood by him. "Brother Ninian," said he with an anxious, contrite look.

"So, have you danced enough? Do you want me to take your place? But I cannot, my boy; I am tired!"

"I see that. I often see you look tired now, or hear Lindsay say you do. Ah, brother," cried Edmund, with a burst of the old fraternal affection, which had been closer between him and Ninian than between any of the other boys, "do not let me go away! I ought not indeed."

"Nay — why so?"

"Because you are already hard-worked, and have many cares; I might help you a little, being next eldest. I'll stay — ay, and work in the office too, if you will only let me."

"There's a good boy, and a kind boy! But no it is not necessary. You are not fit for that sort of life. We cannot harness young antelopes to waggons, you know! Let your elder brother do that duty. He is a good draught-horse, and he likes it!"

"Are you sure of that?"

"Quite sure. There was a time, as I told you in the study, when I had my wandering notions as well as other youths; but I knew all this was wrong, and ought not to be, so I struggled and — conquered. We have all battles to fight: you will too, my boy, as I forewarned you."

"Yes, I know."

"And you will have plenty of hard work likewise, more than you look for, ere you become — what I long to see you — the Great Man of the Family."

Edmund laughed, but there was a quiver in that

beautiful mouth of his, which while indicating exquisite sensitiveness of feeling, also indicated the great deficiency of his character — want of will.

"— Come, the 'wee hours' are drawing on:

'The Old Year lies a-dying,'

as Edmund would poetically observe," cried Tinie. "What are you two doing, sentimentalising there? Literally, laying your heads together! Get away with you, Edmund! This is my place."

With a comical jealousy, always evinced by her when any of the others were particularly noticed by her favourite brother, she ousted Edmund, and enthroned herself on the arm of the chair, throwing her arm round Ninian's neck.

"Now, brother — now, Professor, take out your watches. A quarter to twelve? — Twenty minutes? Ah, we'll keep by the Professor's time, seeing he always takes it by the forelock."

"Tinie, the atrocity of your jokes is fortunately equalled by their rarity," said Reuben, in a sarcastic parenthesis.

"Little boys shouldn't interrupt when their elders are making a speech," was the indignant answer. "Now I put it to the vote, what will we do in these twenty minutes? Shall Edmund indulge us with some readings? He's off for Tennyson already, I'll engage! Bravo — let us all chorus the lines!

'He gave me a friend and a true, true love,'

(Three, I believe, to Edmund) —

'And the New Year will take them away.' "

There was a brief silence, as if this quotation fell somewhat *mal-à-propos*. It seemed to make them feel,

as all must at times, even amidst the merriest of New Year frolics — of the possibilities that may come with twelve months' change.

Ninian spoke first — perhaps his thoughts were such as would least bear dwelling on. "Nay, we will have no reading, lest we should get solemn. Come, I give you all your choice; must we dance the New Year in, or jump it in, or —"

"I don't understand," said Hope, somewhat puzzled. She had crept near; and, rather tired and out of breath, was leaning against the back of Mr. Græme's chair, until Tinie proposed sharing the arm of it with her. Ninian made a few attempts to move, but his young gaolers held him fast; so he was obliged to submit. This little interlude being ended, he explained what he meant by jumping the New Year in — namely, that it was considered lucky on the clock's striking twelve to begin and jump step by step up-stairs, without speaking a word.

"I should like to try it, if it would only bring me a fortunate year," said Hope, rather seriously. "At least," added she, with a grateful look at Ninian, and another, very loving, at Lindsay and the rest, "if it would only make this New Year as happy as the old."

"Now, Hope, we will not be sentimental; and I do not like jumping up-stairs; we'll bring in the New Year as we always do — a very nice way. You'll see!" cried Tinie.

The house-clock began to strike, "Ay, there it goes," said Ninian; "is it right by your watch, Professor? — Yes! — Ah, well, good-by Old Year!" And he sighed, even as if this had been the last of his happy years.

He waited until the last sound of the clock had ceased, then took a light in his hand and went forward,

according to an old custom, which had become engrafted on the family, to open the hall-door and let in the New Year. They all followed in a confused troop, some merrier than others, but every one eagerly pressing forward. Lindsay came last, with a quiet composed sadness in her look. To her all New Years were now the same. They could not dring her either a joy or a sorrow beyond those she had already known, and outlived.

The little party crowded back. "Now everybody must kiss everybody!" cried Tinie; after which lucid explanation she began this august ceremony, the crowning triumph of Hogmanay, by bestowing a hearty embrace on her brother Ninian. The whole family circle went through the same affectionate duty in a combination of infinite reduplications; the only exception to the "everybody" being Kenneth Reay, who stood on the hearth and looked on the fire. He was not accustomed to this sort of amusement.

When it was concluded, Ninian said gravely, with a trembling tenderness in his voice, "Sister Lindsay, and children all, a happy New Year! And until the next, may God bless us and take care of us, every one, especially Edmund!"

All eyes turned upon the boy with a regretful kindness — some even dimmed with tears. They had teased Edmund and loved to teased him; they had even quarrelled with him sometimes, as brothers and sisters always quarrel, but still they now felt that he was one of them — the first brother leaving the family home. They went up to him, one after the other, the two younger boys shaking hands with him with a brave contempt of any further weakness than — "Take care of yourself,

old fellow," while the girls hung about his neck and kissed him.

At last poor Edmund, fairly unmanned, and being but a tender-hearted youth at the best, hid his face on Lindsay's shoulder and — made a baby of himself! Afterwards, his newly-fledged dignity and boyish pride being quite subdued, — until the household separated he sat beside his elder sister watching her sorrowful countenance, or followed her quietly about, doing all sorts of little things for her which he had never condescended to do before, and which he would soon do no longer.

In a little time the festivities ceased, and the younger ones, together with the twins, were despatched to bed. Lindsay disappeared for the domestic duty of putting things a little in order. As for Tinie, she, with unaccountable wilfulness, had ran up the garden to unlock the gate for Dr. Reay, insisting moreover on doing it alone, since the hour between twelve and one on a New Year's Eve is supposed to be the time when ghosts and goblins "most do congregate!" and she said she particularly wished to see one in the avenue.

Ninian was left by himself in the parlour. He stood leaning on the mantelpiece with both his arms. Heavy clouds of thought swept over him — he could not drive them away.

There was a step — the step that, light as it was, he somehow invariably heard all over the house. Hope entered.

"I am come back to bid you good-night, Mr. Græme. Tinie carried me off so hastily, that I forgot to do so before."

"Never mind, my dear."

"Nay, I do mind, and it was very wrong of me; but I think you have forgot something too."

"Have I? — very likely," he answered, with an absent, weary air. He felt indeed weary of himself and of the world.

"Do you know — I hope you will not be vexed at my reminding you — but do you know you never wished me a happy New Year?"

"Have I not? Well, I do so now, then," said he, holding out his hand, without looking towards her.

Her voice took a pained tone. "Dear Mr. Græme, it is not a happy New Year to me unless you are satisfied with me, and care for me."

"Unless I care for you?" repeated he steadily. "That I do, Hope, as I have told you many a time."

"Then look at me kindly and smilingly, as you look at Tinie."

He turned round to her. All the world seemed to grow dim — he saw nothing but the young face, lifting up such affectionately beseeching eyes, in which the great tears stood shining. He stretched out his arms to embrace her.

"Child — may I? It is New Year's Day!"

She came, all innocently, without a demur. He folded her to his heart — closely, but softly, and with grave tenderness, as a father or a brother might do.

"God bless thee with many, many happy New Years, my darling, my innocent child! God love thee — I cannot — I dare not!"

But she only heard the blessing — nothing more.

CHAPTER XVI.

To the utter astonishment of everybody, the Professor, having the previous night taken farewell of the whole family, on New Year's morning reappeared at The Gowans. He seemed in a very unsettled state of mind.

One minute he said he should start that night, and then he was quite uncertain whether he should go that week or the next — or any week at all. His honest face became all sorts of colours, and as he sat at breakfast his hands trembled like those of a nervous young lady. He looked round the household circle with a half-envious, and wholly disconsolate look, saying, with an expression of feeling quite new to him, "that he was very sorry to leave them all, and he did not think he should ever be so happy as he had been with them at The Gowans."

At last, when most of the household had flitted away in various directions, he took out of each pocket two enormous scientific-looking volumes.

"I hope you will accept this one, Græme, for the sake of auld lang syne. As to the other — if Miss Christina would continue her geological studies —"

Christina pouted, and "didn't think she should."

"Ah — well — it's no matter; but I fancied she might like the book."

Ninian saw his disappointed look, and was half vexed with Tinie for not showing more interest in her old friend and teacher. He told her to thank Kenneth Reay,

and take him into the study to write her name on the gift. "A valuable gift, and valuable autograph it is, too, and my little sister ought to be very proud of it."

But Tinie, wilful ever, went as if she were neither proud nor even pleased.

Ninian stayed a few minutes talking to Lindsay. For Our Sister, who sat doing some light sewing for her boy's benefit, looked so downcast that it was quite sad to see her.

"Come, cheer up, Lindsay. See how merry Edmund is this morning! He does not mind going at all — and is so full of hope. We must not make him dull again, must we?"

"No, no!" She pressed her eyelids back upon the mist that came between her and her work, and then her needle went on rapidly as ever.

Ninian passed into his study. The Professor sat at the table, his hands folded on the open book; but the dreary, vacant expression of his eyes showed he was not reading. Tinie stood at the window — her face flushed — beating her little fingers against the panes.

"What — have you got into a discussion, and quarrelled? I think that sister of mine must be the most troublesome pupil you ever had. Are you not glad to get rid of her?"

"I suppose so," was poor Kenneth's answer, evidently not knowing what he said.

"Thank you. Of course you are!" Tinie replied, with a low curtsey.

"Why, what is the matter? What rude prank have you been playing, you foolish child?"

"Merely that Dr. Reay wished me to begin a — a new branch of science, which I have no inclination for

just yet — and I laughed at him. That's all." She was bounding out of the room — and then, as by a second thought, came back, and held out the tips of her fingers. "Good-by, Professor, for the present. Shake hands?"

He made no attempt to do so; but with the slightest possible shade of seriousness she took his hand — at least just touched it, and was off out of the room.

"Kenneth," said Ninian, grasping his hand, as an almost impossible suspicion flitted through the brother's mind. "My poor fellow, is it —?"

"Yes — that's it. I've been an old fool for a great many years. Now I must go back to my ologies."

This was the only confidence that passed between them.

"I think," said the Professor, after a long pause, "that I will have little time to prepare my first lecture, unless I start for London to-night."

"Then, suppose I go back with you into Edinburgh, and see you off?"

"Thank you," he replied, with an odd contortion of the mouth. "Thank you, Ninian! And," he added, hesitatingly, "if you don't mind, I would like to take the boy with me. He will be company for me, you know."

"He shall go, then," answered Ninian cordially; and went out to admonish the household, or rather Lindsay, into speedy preparation.

"I'll stay here and read. I have nothing to do — nothing!" said Kenneth, in a quiet resignation that was sorrowful enough. But he sat with his hands on his knees, never trying to find a book; until Ninian came in, displaying a rare old copy of Laplace. In the which with brightening eyes the Professor plunged, and there buried all his tribulations.

His friend left him, and went to see after the momentous preparations on Edmund's account. For Ninian was one of those useful individuals in a house, whose aid everybody wants and nobody can do without. There were at least half a dozen voices calling upon him for cords, addresses, and keys of carpet-bags. His invaluable pair of hands were able to do anything — nor scorned to do it.

"I think we have completed everything now," said Lindsay, as quietly, but pale and with quivering eyelids, she moved about Edmund's room; while the boy himself, excited and happy, stood by and talked to her of all his plans.

"I shall study so many hours at college, and then during the rest of the time I shall write. Perhaps I may soon become a real author. Would you be glad, sister?"

"Very glad. But you will promise to take care of yourself? You will not sit up late at night, or take to smoking, or any of those horrible things?"

Edmund laughed and promised — at least, with conditions.

"And you will be careful on wet mornings, and not go off to college forgetting your plaid, as you used to do here; there will not be your sister to remind you of it, you know."

And Lindsay sighed, remembering how she used to stand and watch him up the avenue — her handsome boy! with his light, quick walk, his brown curls flying, and his books under his arm. She would not do so any more now.

"Edmund," she said, with a trembling voice, "don't forget your sister — don't! You are but a youth, and

she is becoming almost an old woman; but she did care for you — she did indeed! You will try to grow up a good man — will you not? You'll never let the time come when it might grieve her to think of the days when she took care of you, and was so proud of you — her own boy!"

"But, sister, I can't be a boy for ever and aye — Nay, you're not crying?"

"No, no! I am very glad you are going, Edmund. I couldn't expect to have you here always. I don't even want you to think of me, if you have other things to think of. Only wherever you are, or whatever you become, remain still my good, innocent boy! that when I see your mother in heaven she may know I did my duty by you, as I promised."

Lindsay fell on her young brother's neck, kissed him, and wept. Then she recovered her old quiet self, and scarcely spoke another word, or shed another tear, until Edmund went away.

He went away quite cheerfully, — boylike! Perhaps his farewell was rather over-boastful in its composure, lest his brothers and sisters might contemn him for his weakness the night before. He let no one go with him to the gate but Lindsay; so how he bade good-by to her they did not know. She came back, said a few words to the little group that stood rather ruefully by the parlour fire, and then went up into her own room until dinner-time.

It certainly was a dreary New Year's Day. Ninian had departed with the two travellers to Edinburgh. Tinie had mysteriously vanished likewise. Hope and the twins sat all the afternoon, looking very disconsolate, and wondering how the house would get on without

Edmund. Everybody felt it a comfort when Ninian returned. There was always something like sunshine brought in by his kindly face. He began and talked cheerily about the travellers, until he nearly banished the atmosphere of dulness that was gathering over The Gowans.

"Where's Tinie? Not come back yet?" said the elder brother, just as they were sitting down to dinner. "There will be a snow-storm directly, and it is getting so dark. Does anybody know where that wilful lassie went out walking to-day?"

Nobody did know, not even Hope, except that Tinie had come into her room, speaking rather as if she were annoyed, and put on her bonnet and departed, refusing all company, but saying she would be back to dinner. And just as they were beginning to get uneasy, a little figure, all covered with snow-sprinklings, came running down the avenue.

"Where have you been?" said Ninian, meeting her in the hall.

"Walking, and paying calls."

"That was not right, when you knew Edmund was going away. You might have stayed to see him off."

"So I did. I went to the railway-station, just for a whim you know."

"I never saw you, child."

"To be sure not! I ran down to the further end and stood there as the train passed. I saw them, and they saw me. How Edmund stared, and the Professor, too. Oh, it was such fun!"

"Well, you are the most incomprehensible young damsel!"

"Of course I am, but am I not also the nicest, and best, and truest little sister in the world? Brother

Ninian will not be cross with me, will he?" said she, in an irresistibly cajoling tone, shaking the snow off her black curls upon his hands.

Certainly, Tinie made everybody fond of her. He was not surprised at that. And he himself shared the same weakness to such a degree, that he was glad thus for the third time to have escaped losing her by marriage, supposing his dim suspicion concerning his poor friend Kenneth to be true. But he determined, unless Tinie made any confession on the subject, not to speak to her about it at all. He was really tired of lecturing on love affairs, and ready to sigh with Lindsay, "Oh, these children! what will we do with these children!"

After dinner they made the accustomed ring round the fireside, the missing link being closed up. With the shyness of regret that is often felt in a family circle, every one shrank from mentioning Edmund — only Lindsay, moving about with an air of slight restlessness, found one of his old exercise-papers lying on the floor; he was always such an untidy boy. They saw her pick it up and put it carefully aside, but no one said a word. However, as she returned to her seat, Hope stole quietly beside her into Edmund's accustomed place, took her hand, and held it silently but fast.

"Ah, children," said Ninian, after a heavy pause, "I do not like changes. I cannot part with any more of you. You must all just stay as you are."

"Hope and Pussy being included!" observed Tinie, who was sitting in her usual place, only rather more subdued and thoughtful than usual; being engaged in stroking the cat, instead of teasing her.

Ninian smiled affectionately at Hope — he had seen all her tender wiles to comfort his sister Lindsay; but

he had not time to speak before there was a loud knocking heard at the door. Tinie started up, colouring from brow to chin; while Lindsay seemed much alarmed. Everybody else took it very quietly.

There was a pompous voice in the passage. "Miss Ansted! I wish to see Miss Ansted." And the same instant the door opened.

Hope looked thither — turned as white as death — and cowered back into Lindsay's arms. "It is my father. Oh! I know it is my father."

Ninian glanced once towards her — his poor frightened bird! — and an indescribable fear oppressed him. Still, he advanced to meet the stranger. "Mr. Ansted?"

"Certainly. And you are Mr. Græme, though a good deal altered. Glad to see you, my young friend," said, with a patronisingly civil air, the — not exactly the *gentleman*, though he evidently thought himself so. "And now, sir, as I cannot see quite distinctly in this light, will you tell me which of these young people is my daughter?"

"She is there, sitting by my eldest sister."

"Oh, indeed! Your servant, Miss Græme." And he bowed with studied politeness. "But, my daughter; I think it would be more respectful if she came to speak to me."

Hope came, moving slowly and feebly. When she passed Ninian, he felt her wildly grasp his hand, as if in a mute appeal for help — she, a child going to meet her own father! What sort of a father must he have been?

Ninian kept her hand; pressed it close to give her courage, and took her to Mr. Ansted.

"So, how d'ye do, Hope? You have grown very

little in these seven years! Well, are you not glad to see me, child?"

"Yes, papa." The name came out with shyness, as though long foreign to her tongue, and forced, as if he had never taught her to utter it in the caressing way that kind fathers love.

"Come, kiss me, like a good girl. And, Mr. Græme, may I trouble you to order a light, and let me look at her? My daughter will be something worth looking at, I assure you, or ought to be."

Ninian felt as if he could have knocked him down, the — man that was Hope's father! But such a proceeding being quite impossible, he lighted the gas, and moved away towards his sisters.

"Is that the old — individual?" whispered Tinie. "Well! I never saw such a hor —"

"Hush!" said Ninian, trying to keep his restless eye from wandering towards his darling. She stood, evidently in violent agitation, which with all her might she tried to repress before her father. No one certainly would ever have taken her for Mr. Ansted's daughter. Not that he was by any means such a "horror of a man," as Tinie's prejudice inclined her to suppose. He was tolerably well-looking, and well-dressed — even overdressed. There was no decided vulgarity either in his person or manner, except that worst of all vulgarities, a coarse mind. From his height of portly self-sufficiency he seemed to gaze complacently on all the world, as if to say, "Behold me — I am Mr. Ansted."

He looked on his daughter with eyes that betokened he was admiring her merely as *his* daughter — the child of Ralph Ansted, Esquire. He held her at arm's length — the poor trembling blushing thing — then

nodded his head with a "She'll do" sort of air. At least Ninian thought so; poor Ninian, to whom his treasure seemed too sacred almost for human gaze!

"You are very like your mother, my dear; but of course you don't remember her at all. My late wife, Mr. Græme, was a most charming woman, great granddaughter to the Right Honourable Sidney Hope — we perpetuated the family name, you see."

Ninian made some assent and tried to converse, chiefly to attract Mr. Ansted's attention from poor Hope, who, at the mention of her mother's name, trembled more than ever; finally burst into tears, and was resigned to Lindsay.

"How very unpleasant," said Mr. Ansted, drawing to the fire, and taking the arm-chair as a matter of course; "but my daughter was sure to feel agitated on seeing me. Perhaps, indeed, I ought to have announced my coming; but my various enemies, you understand —"

"Your —" creditors, Mr. Græme would have said, but paused out of delicacy, remembering he himself had been and still was one of the number, — "your difficulties, I suppose you mean?"

And he regarded his old client, somewhat puzzled to see into what a fine gentleman the runaway bankrupt had bloomed.

"My dear fellow," said the latter, eyeing askance the rest of the Græme family, who had retired to the other end of the room, "I shall be able to arrange everything, I assure you. America is the surest country in the world for making a speedy fortune. I should not like it mentioned here, of course, but really my property now is all that a gentleman can desire. My boys have bril-

liant prospects, and you must allow me to pay you handsomely for your care of my daughter. She will do my establishment great credit — great credit, indeed."

Ninian's heart grew like ice in his bosom. "Then, I suppose, you are now come to claim her?"

"Certainly. I have bought a mansion near London; she is quite old enough to be its mistress; in fact she will look charming at the head of my table. I wish to take her home immediately. Suppose we send for her back and inform her of this."

"Not yet, not yet," said Ninian. He took thought of the child even then. "Excuse me, but Miss Ansted is a very gentle creature and much attached to my sisters; it will grieve her to leave them, I know. Do not let her be told just yet, or let my sister Lindsay do it."

"This is quite incomprehensible," answered Mr. Ansted, with his most dignified air; "I should have thought Hope could not but be delighted to return with her father."

"You forget she has not seen you, and rarely heard from you, for seven years; nor, as I understand, was she much with you at any time. Mr. Ansted, a mere filial instinct will not counteract all these opposing circumstances."

Ninian spoke in his own honest way, but his sharpest truths were always so mixed with gentleness, that no one could be offended at them.

Mr. Ansted looked annoyed. However, he could not be very pompous before a man who knew him and his affairs so well as Ninian Græme.

"As you like. But I really hope my daughter will not turn out a troublesome, nervous young lady, and

that these strong friendships of hers will not interfere with the attention due to her father. She will find me a very kind one, I assure you."

Ninian made some vague answer; he never could turn his tongue to the lie of politeness.

He sat and listened to Mr. Ansted's talk, which was one slow moving wheel of harmless platitudes, circling and turning perpetually on that one great centre — himself. From thence all other conversational interests radiated. He was no fool; he had good common sense, and had seen much of the world; but wherever he was, and whatever he talked about, it was quite evident that he considered the most important person on God's earth to be Ralph Ansted, Esquire.

All this Ninian dimly perceived. He paid due attention to his companion's words; but they melted into air as soon as spoken. His sole consciousness was that the child was about to be taken from him; when, he dared not ask.

"At tea, Hope came in, looking very pale, yet sweet, calm, and fair, as he seemed to have never before seen her — at least, he thought so now. He drank in her every look and movement with a greedy despair; but stealthily, trying all the while to play the kindly host — to talk and to listen, as he was bound.

Hope did in all things as he knew his right-minded, gentle darling would do. She came and sat by her father, spoke to him a little, timidly enough, but as if she were anxious to please. Only once or twice, when he launched out about his beautiful house, and asked her how she would like a gay London life, she drew back, though imperceptibly to all but Ninian, and crept closer to Miss Græme's side.

As for Tinie, she listened to Mr. Ansted's stories of his brilliant life in America, and his numerous and celebrated London friends with a smile of polite amusement, an occasional frown, or a gentle allusion to the renowned Baron Munchausen. It was evident that the quickwitted damsel saw through their guest at once, and did not approve of him at all.

At length, at a late hour, Mr. Ansted thought proper to rise.

"You will stay with us to-night? we can easily accommodate you," said Ninian. He wished to show all due consideration to the father of Hope.

"No, thank you! In truth, I find no accommodation like a good hotel. One is so independent; gets such admirable breakfasts and dinners — that is, when one can pay well for them. Nothing like an hotel for me. But I shall see you to-morrow, and make better acquaintance with my daughter here. Good night, Hope."

"Good night, papa." A certain kindness in his tone brought more frankness into hers, and there was something even of confidence and pleasure in her clear eyes.

"Don't — don't look so like your mother, child" he muttered; perhaps going back to a time when his own important self had not been quite his first object in the world. And so he went away.

After he left, they were all silent and constrained. Whatever Tinie thought or longed to say, she could not say it while Hope was by; and Hope herself seemed in a strange half-bewildered mood. She sat by Lindsay, never speaking, but apparently absorbed in thought; or now and then looking from Miss Græme to Ninian, with a wistful uneasy glance.

He could not bear it. To talk to the child — to meet her eyes, was beyond even *his* strength.

"Now, children, the sooner you are off to bed the better," said he, as they lingered about in evident restraint. All gladly disappeared, except Hope, who clung to Lindsay still.

The three stood silently before the fire. At last Hope mustering a desperate courage, said: "Mr. Græme, did you know that my father was coming?"

"I did not. I had not heard from him for months."

"Did he say anything to you about me? Do you think he means to — that is — shall I have to go away from here?"

Her voice was broken and faint, but she struggled violently against the sorrow which she seemed to feel it wrong to show.

"Nay, Hope," said Ninian, trying to smile. "We will not talk about these things until to-morrow. Go to sleep, and think only of what is pleasant — that my little Hope has found her father again. Moreover, she is going to turn out a grand lady."

"That, at least, I don't care for — not a straw. Oh, Lindsay, Lindsay! hold me fast — I can't part with you!" sobbed the affectionate girl. Then, struck with a consciousness that this grief jarred against her new duty, she ceased and raised herself from Miss Græme's bosom, standing quiet and composed, though still with fast-dropping tears.

"My child — my dear Hope! she will do what is right, I know, and so must we all. We shall know everything to-morrow," was all Ninian could find power to utter.

He knew that his strength was going, and he must

fly, so he bade all good night, left his darling in Lindsay's arms, and walked with steps slow and heavy, lest he should fall by the way, into his study.

If some of our close, quiet chambers, pleasant rooms we have loved, were suddenly peopled with the phantasms of our old selves as we have appeared in many an awful hour when none saw us but God, — if the dumb walls could re-utter our words — the void air revive the impress of our likeness then — what a revealing it would be! Surely we ought not to judge harshly, but each of us to have mercy upon one another.

CHAPTER XVII.

"You were late last night, brother," said Lindsay, at breakfast, on the second morning of the New Year. "I heard you come up-stairs long after we did."

"Yes; I had work to do."

That was true. It was the sort of work that some have to do — the toiling of spirit against flesh, which, if anything could be counted acceptable before the Most Holy, will be so counted, when, thank God! the long day of life, with all its labour, is over for eternity.

He had weighed with himself, for the last time, every argument concerning that secret with which — for many months now — he had been battling continually. He had considered calmly, with a mind as unbiassed as he could make it, whether his course of self-immolation was *necessary*. But there the plain, common-sense truth stared him in the face, that to bring his wife into his own present household was neither more nor less than impossible. So was the other alternative, that his single toil should maintain two families.

There was still the chance of waiting. Waiting — begging from Mr. Ansted his rich heiress! — being accused of unworthy guardianship, — of stealing away a young girl's unconscious love. He was a proud man, and an honourable, was Ninian Græme. This argument but strengthened him in his firm will. Nothing ever moved him, save one thought of the child herself.

He had stood and seen Hope's tears, apparently with-

out heeding them, but every drop had fallen on his heart like molten lead. Though, in his stern self-martyrdom, he would have been glad she did not love him, yet, if she did, something told him that it was an awful thing for a man, on any pretext whatever, to ruin a girl's happiness for life. No fancied duty — no proud or capricious will — no self-doubting delusion — ought to disguise from him that plain truth. Some women take a love-fit — easily enough, too, sigh, weep, and "get over" it; but Ninian felt, or, at least, conjectured, that Hope Ansted was not of these. He knew that a heart like hers, not passionate, but deep and still, once wounded, would bear the wound through life. It might not break, or it might live on, half-broken — many hearts do. But there the wrong would be. Did she love him, he held in his power a young soul of Heaven's giving, with every impulse fresh, full of dawning life that might be fulfilled in happiness and in usefulness towards God and man; if he turned away and left it — loving it, but still leaving it — God only knew what it might become. Perhaps one day it might be required at his hands.

— Not, if he had been himself clear from loving, or free from act or word that might have won love, but the case was not so now.

He saw that if Hope's peace were in his keeping, there was upon him a duty which transcended all duties; since for no cause, save some bar which would make such a confession sinful before heaven and earth, has a man who loves the right to close his heart against the woman that loves him.

On that night, during his solemn communings with his own conscience, Ninian had resolved that — did he *see reason* to believe that beneath the child's simple af-

fection was any feeling which might be wounded with the wound he had not shrunk to deal with himself, he would at all chances tell her the whole truth, and then leave her free. He knew by his own heart, wherewith he judged hers, that did she love him, ten, fifteen, or twenty years of patient trustful betrothal would be as nothing, so that he might at last take his wife to his bosom, and thank Heaven for his life's late-won, but most perfect crown.

"— Have you, then, sat up all night over your work?" said Hope, always full of quick sympathy for any one's little cares, especially her guardian's. "That was a pity. You should have let me help you."

For, once or twice, when he was hard-pressed, Ninian had indeed made use of her neat handwriting for some light copying, chiefly to ease her mind, simple child! by the notion that she really was able to do a little for him who did so much for her.

"Is the work finished now?" persisted she. "Did it really keep you up half the night? Couldn't I have helped you — just a little?"

"You child? No, no!"

"But you'll let me do a little this morning! I am in such a working humour, and so restless besides; it will do me good to fix me to anything."

Ninian reflected that what he had to tell her concerning her departure must be told at once; likewise, did he desire to read her innocent heart, that, too, must be read at once. And it so chanced, partly through his own firm planning, partly from the household ways, that Hope and himself were very rarely left alone now. What was to be done must be done. The opportunity might not return.

He told Hope, with a quiet, smiling manner, that he had indeed some work for her to do; and if she had an hour to spare, she might come and do it in his study — that was, if she liked.

"If I like! As if I should not like to do anything or everything for you!" cried she, hastening to obey. Tinie wanted to go also. "No, no; you'll make me laugh, and then I shall copy badly. And I must not do anything badly that I do for Mr. Græme. You shall not come. I'll lock the door, Tinie."

After a merry struggle, she ran in laughing, and took her place at Ninian's table.

"I will be with you presently," said he, with averted face, as he walked up-stairs. He did not come down for many minutes.

Hope was sitting rather thoughtfully. He always noticed her to grow thoughtful when she was left alone. But on his entrance she looked up with the frank smile that continually greeted him.

"I am so anxious to begin. See, I have been practising my 'lawyer's hand,' as Tinie calls it, all over the paper. I think I should really be of use to you in course of time."

While speaking, her face saddened, as if some of last night's doubts were troubling her mind. But all that morning she had never spoken of them, and scarcely even of her father. Only at times there came a restless shadow over her bright looks, which showed that, as ever, she felt a great deal more than she betrayed.

Ninian gave her her light task, and applied himself to his own, almost in silence. As he moved the papers, his hand — his strong right hand — shook like an infant's. He heard his heart's throbs, loud as though in

the whole world there had been no other sound. But Hope went on, calmly and busily writing, her long curls sweeping the paper; occasionally looking up with a pleased look that said, "See how proud I am to be so useful!"

The ever-interrupting Tinie put her head in at the door.

"There you are as busy as two bees! What, did I startle away your brains, brother dear, that you look so dazed? Nay, I'll not tease you again, for I'm away to Princes-street with Esther. Suppose I meet your papa, Hope, and bring him here?"

Hope paused and said, "Yes, I shall be glad."

"What will he say to find you working away for the dear life in this fashion? You that are to be —" And Tinie's good feeling conquering her mischief caused the sentence to remain unfinished.

"I know papa would be pleased to find me doing anything for Mr. Græme," said Hope gravely.

"Well — industry is a virtue! And if all trades fail, you will make a capital writer's-clerk. Or what is better, a writer's wife. Should you like that, Hope?"

"I don't know. I really never thought about it," Hope answered, with a little low frank-hearted laugh.

"Then our brother shall keep a look-out for you among every young W. S. of his acquaintance. Will you not, brother?"

"Christina, you trouble me. I have business to think of," said he, in a voice so hoarse and sharpened, that Miss Tinie took it for "crossness" and made her speedy exit.

Hope, after one anxious look towards Mr. Græme, went on quickly with the harmless amusement she sup-

posed was work. Many times, feeling that minute after minute was going by, and yet his words were unsaid, did Ninian struggle to speak to her, but could not. At last she spoke of her own accord.

"There, I have done one page. I wonder how long will it take me to finish the rest?

"Are you tired of it?"

"Tired — oh no! It is so nice sitting quiet here with you. But, I am thinking," and she hesitated — "what time did my father say he would be here to-day?"

"He mentioned no special hour. About noon, I suppose."

She glanced at the clock, with an expression less of anticipation than nervous apprehension. "It is only just twelve, and papa was never very punctual; at least, when I was a child I remember hearing people say so. No, he will not be here yet."

This was murmured half to herself, yet, being said, her quick blush seemed to accuse her of some wrong.

"I hope, Mr. Græme, you do not think, or let anybody think, that I am not glad to see my father. But I was so startled and overcome last night, and this morning his coming seems like a dream — not a reality at all. Perhaps my mind will get more settled when I see him again — he is sure to come, is he not?"

"Yes, and before he comes, there was something he told me to say to you."

The pen fell from her hand, and in her aspect was a look amounting almost to terror. Ninian repented him of the haste with which, in a sort of desperation, he had begun to speak.

"Do not tremble — there is nothing to alarm, my dear child. It is only your father's plans regarding you."

She trembled more than ever, but tried hard to conceal it. "No, of course I am not frightened; how should I be, at anything papa says? But tell it to me, quick — quick."

"He wishes to take you home with him at once."

"I thought so!" She leaned her head on the desk where she was writing — made one or two violent efforts to repress her emotion, but in vain. She said, mournfully, "I must go away, then — I must leave The Gowans, and you, and Lindsay, and them all! Oh! what will become of me!" Tears and sobs, bitter and unrestrained, burst from her.

Ninian rose and came behind her chair, lest, lifting up her face, she might by chance see his. He knew well what was written there. He knew, though he could bind his tongue as if with iron bands, and clench tightly down upon his breast the arms that longed to enfold and comfort his darling; still even *her* innocent eyes, looking on his countenance, might read what no man could wholly conceal, the tokens of so passionate a love.

"Hope, dear child, it grieves me to see you weep so much."

It might be that there was a strange hardness in the forced words, for they made her start as if they had conveyed a reproach.

"It is very wicked — I know it is wicked all the time — but I feel as if I could not help it. However, I will try."

And that strong sense of right — the same in her weak, girlish nature, as in Ninian's brave heart, and which perhaps had formed the hidden sympathy that drew him to the child — made her, after one or two struggles more, rise with dry eyes, ready for all she had to hear.

He told her — leaning over her chair, and clasping her hand which she had held out to him — all that Mr. Ansted had informed him.

"And when must I go?" said she, brokenly, though she still controlled her tears.

"He did not say; but, I should think, soon, unless we could persuade him to stay a little while in Edinburgh."

"Oh, keep him — keep him! — if only for a few weeks, until I get accustomed to the thought of leaving you all; you, the first that ever showed kindness to me — the first that ever I learned to love."

"Love!" How his hand, that touched hers, quivered! But he stood upright still; motionless as if he had been a bloodless statue, and not a living man. "Hope, do you, then, love — us — so much?"

"How could I help it? Are you not all so good — have you not treated me, every one of you, as though I were your own sister? And I am sure I have felt as if I were."

"My sister, too?"

She paused a little, then said, innocently and sweetly, "Don't be angry with me, but I did not always feel exactly so with you. I was rather afraid of you at one time, you seemed so grave; but afterwards, when Lindsay and I were ill, I began to understand you, and to love you as much as I did any of them. You believe that now?"

"Yes."

"Many a time, except that I feared you might think it rude, I have longed to ask you to let me say 'Brother,' as the rest do. It would be the greatest happiness of my life to feel you were my brother always."

"Do so, then," said Ninian. His voice was very low, solemn, and cold. His joys aud his fears were alike gone from him. There was no need for any struggle now.

He let the child take his hands, clasp them, and lay her hot cheek upon them, in undisguised fondness. He heard her murmur the name he had given her leave to call him. He knew he had no cause to dread her tenderness. She held him only as a brother, nothing more.

All his long, slow self-torture — all the pain he had sometimes given to the child herself — all the present's rending strife — all his resolves for the future — had been useless, baseless folly. While strength was needed, he had been strong; but now he felt all his limbs relaxing. He let go Hope's hand, and went and sat in his arm-chair.

Thither she followed him with her affectionate cares, and soft, sweet speech.

"Dear Brother," — her lips played pleasantly with the new word. — "I know you are working too hard. I am afraid you will be ill, which will make me so unhappy!"

"Will it? That is very kind! But have no fear about me. And besides we were not talking of that now, but of your leaving us."

"I had almost forgotten it — I had, indeed! Oh, that I could forget it altogether, and stay here always!"

"You do not quite mean that. Your father —"

Poor Hope! The flood of crimson shame again rose. In a burst of contrition, she knelt beside Ninian's chair, beseeching him to excuse what was wrong in her, and to help her to do that which was right.

He answered her — he felt very brave to answer now:

"There can be but one thing which is right to do: you must go with your father, if we loved you ever so dearly, as we do — all of us."

"Ah! that is so sweet to hear!"

"Still, we have no right to keep you from your father, nor, I think, would you wish us to do so."

"No, not if it were wrong. But yet, paying him duty, I also owe some to you. If I could only fulfil both!"

"How do you mean?"

"Oh! if I could be spared this parting from you all — if you would persuade my father to come and live here in Edinburgh, where I should be near you, and could see you every day."

Ninian shuddered. With the first impulse of despair that seizes every true heart thus tried, he seemed to feel that his burden was growing more than he could bear, — that his only longing, his only hope, must be to shut out the beloved face from him for ever. He replied hastily, — so hastily, that Hope looked up in wounded surprise:

"Child, never think of that; it is impossible."

She assented, blindly and patiently. No one — she least of all — was ever used to question Ninian's will.

"I will say nothing of it then to papa; you know best. Still, it would have made me less unhappy."

He, in his strong self-renunciation, was about to waver and yield; he would almost have laid his heart down for her feet to tread on, if it would have made the child "less unhappy;" but chance, which sometimes steps in like a merciful angel between such sacrifices and their need, came and stood in his way now.

— Not in a very angelic form, though; unless such could be personated by the portly, middle-aged likeness of Mr. Ansted. Ninian discerned, by Hope's quick start, and the tremor which came over her, that she saw her father coming down the avenue. He trembled, too — this dumb, broken-hearted lover, who, a brief time before, had longed to put his treasure from him, anywhere, however soon, that he might escape the torture of seeing her; yet now, the chance of her being taken from him seemed to draw near like a horrible fate. Perhaps this was the last hour — the last moment — that he would sit ever here, alone with his darling, hearing her pleasant voice, receiving the tokens of an affection so unconscious, still, and pure, that sometimes, even in his worst agonies, it calmed him into content. Perhaps very soon, as she went from him, even this tie would cease — being forgotten in worldly ways, or changed into grave, womanly distantness. He could never have her as his "child" again.

His heart cried out with an exceeding bitter cry; but its yearning spent itself upon the silent air. He gazed with mad, dumb passion on the unconscious child — on every line of her face — every wave of her hair — as she stood by the window, watching her father approach. At length, when the loud summons told that she must go, and they would have no more speech together, Ninian's agony struggled into broken words.

"Hope," said he, in a very low voice, "if I let you go, it is because I must. Do not change in your heart toward me; do not let the world spoil my sweet, simple child. And if this same world, which looks so different to us two, is ever hard upon you — if you want comfort, or rest, or counsel — you 'll come to me, my darling!"

She threw herself into his arms of her own will, and wept there heartily and long.

Mr. Ansted's self-important voice, heard in the hall, gave her a louder warning.

"You'll go and speak to my father? I cannot — he must not see that I have been crying!"

Poor Ninian! — he that would have longed to rush away and hide himself from every presence in the wide world. But sometimes life's hardest trials are its little things. They are most brave who can prove equal to both.

"Yes; run away, dear Hope; I will go and meet your father."

So he went. Mr. Ansted's mind was in a somewhat ruffled state; he had had an unpleasant rencontre that morning, and could not smooth his fine feathers down again.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Græme. My daughter quite well this morning? She will be here presently, I suppose?"

"Certainly."

"You told her my intentions respecting her, of course? She will not have much time to fret about leaving, for I find I must return almost immediately."

"Indeed!"

Mr. Ansted never seemed to notice the brief answers — all that Ninian's tongue could speak. People that love to hear the sound of their own voice rarely quarrel with their interlocutors for being men of few words.

"I should like, if possible, to leave to-night. My house and servants cannot well go on without me, and really I find your Edinburgh winds so confoundedly sharp, *they* were almost the death of me last week — did I not

say I had been here since the 27th? But somehow a man in my position has so much to attend to; I positively could not get to The Gowans until last night."

"I am sorry," said Ninian, absently. He was listening for the child's step on the stairs; dreading lest she should come in, thinking how he could best tell her the abrupt news, at which he almost forgot his own pain in remembering hers. "Are you quite sure you can stay no longer than to-night? It is very sudden for Miss Ansted. Her preparations —"

"Must just take their chance. She can leave her wardrobe behind; it might not exactly suit the mistress of *my* house. Anyhow, she must come, for I hate Edinburgh. It is a great annoyance to speak of this, but do you know I had one or two unpleasant visitors this morning. I thought you had settled my affairs better, Mr. Græme. After all these years, too, people are so inconsiderate."

"Mr. Ansted," said Ninian, trying to repress the vague disgust that was rising in his honest mind — "I told you that these claims ought to be satisfied some day or other. I conclude, now you have acquired a fortune, there can be no difficulty in the matter. It will be a great relief to me." And fearful visions — unjust, perhaps, but natural — rose up before him, of Hope's pure mind being first agonised, then tainted, by the lax atmosphere of a spendthrift bankrupt's home.

"Of course I intend to do all that is necessary — all that can be expected of a *gentleman*." It was curious, even comical to see how he harped upon that word. "But people in low life do not consider how indispensable are a few comforts and luxuries. However, I will sacri-

fice all I can. My honour — you know — my honour! Surely that is sufficient."

He said this with the frank *empressé* manner of one solicitous to gain the good opinion of another, though not giving himself overmuch trouble about the matter; which was indeed not likely in a man who had such a good opinion of himself. He had not time to explain further before his daughter came in.

"So, my young lady, it is quite a treat to look at you this morning," said he, regarding her with evident pleasure. She was, indeed, a sweet sight — a proud sight, for any father's eyes. Her manners, — gentle and quiet, neither expressing too much of that filial feeling which in her position could be as yet but a mere instinct, nor showing anything that could be interpreted into the want of it, — were the very perfection of what was as he probably deemed the best quality in the world, "lady-like."

It is good, when people have not all the perfections we desire, to try and give them full credit for those they really have. Ninian took comfort from the kindly way in which Mr. Ansted patted Hope's shoulder, and the smile with which she responded to the same. He longed to see his darling made happy, through any means or in any way. With a strong will, he rose up, leaving the father and daughter alone together.

Immediately afterwards, he thought of the tidings Hope had to hear, and how she would be grieved thereby. He would fain have rushed back to sustain her and help her to bear them. But he could not trust himself. Besides, the sort of bond by which in all her difficulties she unconsciously looked to him for strength, must be broken now. He had better leave her alone with her

father. What right had he to stand between them, or mingle in their conference? Yet bitter — bitter were the writhings of that love which would fain monopolise everything, and yet could claim nothing!

He sat still, waiting until they should summon him. But at every sound he started up, his eager fears all alive, fancying he heard Mr. Ansted's angry voice, or Hope's smothered weeping; ready at any moment to rush in and snatch her, — from whom? Her father!

There was no need for aught so wild. The child was braver than he thought. When, after a long interval, he ventured to return, Hope was sitting quite patient and composed, though without a ray of colour in her face. As Ninian came in, she said to him, in a slow, quiet voice:

"You know that I am going away to-night?"

"Yes, Hope, yes."

Her father turned, and said, pointedly, "*Miss Ansted* will be ready in a few hours, she tells me."

"Oh, Mr. Græme, does Lindsay know? — let me go to Lindsay."

Ninian followed her to the door to call his sister. When out of her father's sight, she turned and clung to his hand with a piteous look.

"Take courage, Hope," he whispered; "it will be over soon. Think how we love you, and how we will never forget you. And God make you happy always, my child!"

He kissed her on the forehead — a hurried, silent kiss; he knew it would be his last. This was the only farewell they had; he did not see her alone again.

During those three hours, the latest Hope was to spend under his roof, Ninian sat in the parlour, dinned out of all thought, all emotion, by the perpetual flowings

of Mr. Ansted's talk. There was some commotion in the house, the girls entering now and then with red eyes — women are always tender-hearted at partings. So, at least, Mr. Ansted said, making on the subject a somewhat discordant jest, which roused Tinie into the hottest indignation. But Ninian never spoke a word. He sat where without turning he could see the door move; sometimes looking uneasily that way, as his sisters entered and departed. Hope only never came.

At last, when her father's restless inquiries about "Miss Ansted" — a new sound in that house — were growing more impatient than ever, she appeared. Great lamentations there were around her, for she had in truth been loved dearly by all the sisters, and these tender, girlish hearts were yet sore from the parting with Edmund.

Hope stood, perfectly quiet and resigned, with the large, silent tears rolling down her cheeks. She kissed every one round, from Lindsay down even to Reuben and Charlie, who were both so sorry to lose her that they did not resist the indignity at all. Ninian was not present. He only came to the carriage door in time to shake her by the hand. She held his fast.

"You'll not leave me here — you'll come with us to the railway?"

"Really, my dear," interposed her father, "we cannot inconvenience Mr. Græme so far, and I must call at my hotel on the way. All *adieux* had much better be ended here."

Hope obeyed without a word; indeed, she could not speak, not even to say good-by.

Ninian pressed her hand, and let it go. She sank back in the carriage, and he saw his darling's sweet face no more.

CHAPTER XVIII.

It was full summer once more at The Gowans — the house of all others where summer had full opportunity of display, for Mr. Græme's garden was decidedly the bonniest in and about Edinburgh. He took much pride in it, which people said was a forewarning of old bachelorhood. Ninian met their jest — as thousands of such jests are met — with the smile that covers everything. It would have taken a very keen eye to see — what good-natured friends unluckily seldom do see — that in most cases this sort of idle banter must necessarily send chance arrows into many a hidden wound.

Ninian was taking his evening stroll round his beloved garden, making acquaintance with every new rosebud that had been born that day — Tinie declared he certainly counted his flowers, and knew them by heart; or now and then listening to some stray mavis which had taken up its abode in the great walnut-tree. Miss Græme came up to him, her face flushed, even her neat dress scarcely so neat as ordinary. She was evidently in that pleasant state of excited activity when people are quite oblivious of their outward appearance.

"Oh, Ninian! this has been a busy day! I wonder you can bear to daunder about so quietly — though, to be sure, you have done as much as any of us. And I fancied you looked pale. Yes! it was right for you to take a little rest and fresh air."

Ninian slightly turned aside a face whereon were written many conflicting thoughts, that his sister could

not and must not read. But for once in her life Lindsay was too busy even to notice her brother.

"— Are you quite sure there will be flowers enough, especially white roses? Hope's tree is in full bloom, I see. Dear little Hope! I wonder if she will come. What do you think?"

"That — if her father allows her — she certainly will. Her last letter showed how anxious she was to be with us at this time."

"Dear child! I knew she would!" said Lindsay, from whose fond remembrance her favourite was never long absent. "To be sure she was scarcely so fond of the twins as she was of Tinie — still, she liked them very much; and she always used to say that she should dearly love to come to the first marriage in the family."

This was, indeed, the grand event that was "casting its shadow before," to-night at The Gowans. So much change had six months brought. Esther and Ruth, being of those quiet sort of girls who never weary their friends with getting into love-troubles — whose wooings and marryings nobody ever seems to contemplate, but who bide their time, and then astonish everybody by a wedding, after which they turn out the best wives and mothers imaginable — the twins were actually going to be married! and, moreover, to be married both at once!

Kindly fate had stepped in and solved the grand difficulty — the parting between two sisters so linked together in right of birth and affection. Two worthy brothers, wanting wives, had accidentally made a descent upon the doves' nest at The Gowans; the result of which was that William and Patrick Fraser carried off Ruth and Esther Græme. All was done in the most commonplace and straightforward way imaginable. Three months

coming to tea once a week — a walk or two round the Calton Hill — an interview with the elder brother — Esther and Ruth called into the study, and coming out with dim eyes, but smiling — a three months' engagement, and a marriage!

Therefore it was that Lindsay was so busy, so innocently important — therefore it was that Ninian walked in his garden, pondering over many things.

"I wonder," repeated Lindsay, in her restless anxiety — "I wonder, will that dear child really come? She could not be here until the last minute, perhaps the latest train to-night, and there is no chance of her staying more than a day. Her father would not let her. Still, only one day's sight of her bonnie face will be something, will it not, Ninian?"

He said simply "Yes!" Yet on the chance of that brief day he had been living week by week, hour by hour, for the last three months. By the light of the new hopes which time had faintly let in upon his life, he wished after this half-year's severance to read in Hope Ansted's manner some token unto which to cling in his future, or to judge faintly of hers.

"I almost think that is the postman at the gate. If she does not come, she would of course have written."

"This is no London letter, it is past the time," said Ninian. He knew the hour well — he had counted it by many a heart-beat.

"How wearisome. Still there might be a letter lying at your office; she often directs hers there. I wish you would go and see."

He went gladly. He felt a miserable restlessness that would not suffer him to keep still anywhere. When he came to the little room — where his clients sat and

listened to the strong clear sense and acute worldly wisdom of the much-trusted Mr. Ninian Græme — he eagerly turned over his heap of letters. The dainty small hand, so pleasant to his eyes, was there.

She would not come, then!

— For the first time in his life, he sat with one of Hope's letters unopened; for the first time, the receiving of such had brought less pleasure than pain. He had so built his heart upon her coming.

The letter was for himself, as, indeed, she usually addressed, saying it was meet that her heterogeneous family epistles should be directed outside to the Head of the Family. He opened and read:

"Dear brother," — she always wrote thus now, — "it almost breaks my heart to think I cannot come. I have waited until the last moment, but papa is unwilling, and says he cannot spare me. Perhaps, if I were very, very selfish and importunate, I might overcome his objections, but I think that would not be right. And you always taught me, not only in your words but in your actions, to do right first, and please oneself afterwards. Therefore you will forgive your little Hope, and tell dear Lindsay and the rest to forgive me too, knowing how all my heart and thoughts will be with you on Monday.

"Papa has only just told me his mind; therefore I have no time to write to any than yourself to-day, but I will not forget to do so to-morrow.

"Ah! dear Mr. Græme, if I could but follow where this letter is going!

"Ever your affectionate,

"Hope Ansted."

Ninian finished the letter, half sighing, yet his spirit was comforted. He discerned all the quiet self-denial of the heart he loved; he knew it was still tender, pure, and undefiled from the world. He looked fondly at Hope's letter, and placed it with another that he carried about with him — the latest received of a goodly number which he had in his desk at home. Therein there was a certain change from the first simple childish epistle he had received from her, but all breathed the same frank affection and innate simplicity. He need not fear that the prosperous worldly life, which, according to Edmund's account, Miss Ansted was leading, had clouded the sweet innocence of his darling.

"One of our travellers will not be here," said Ninian, as he returned home, and put Hope's letter into Lindsay's hands. "Nay, do not look so disappointed: to-night's last train will at least bring us somebody. We must not forget our Edmund."

And in due time Edmund came, causing the twin-brides to be no longer the most important personages in the household.

"I declare he has grown enormously, in inches and moustache," cried Tinie, dancing round him admiringly. "He turns up his collars, patronises studs and a cane, and — faugh — Edmund, you actually smoke!"

Edmund turned on his heel. He was, at all events, not grown into sufficient manhood to be proof against Tinie's quizzing.

"Certainly, London works wonders. If six months there has produced such a change in you, what results has it effected in the Professor?"

"None, I suppose; I see very little of him. He reads from morning till night and from night till morn-

ing, and seems duller and quieter than ever. Miss Reay says, as usual, that he is 'killing himself,' and, by his looks, I shouldn't wonder if he were."

"How very comical!" Having said this, Tinie relapsed into silence, and teased her brother no more.

Strange to say, it was some time before anybody inquired particularly about Hope; and yet not strange, since to none save one did she hold the nearest place. But it was long before Ninian could put the simple question:

"When did you see Hope Ansted?"

"Ay, tell us about dear little Hope!" said Lindsay, rousing herself from that absorbed state of quiet happiness where she sat, doing nothing, but listening to and gazing upon her handsome boy.

"Hope is grown a lovely creature — a most elegant girl. Even Mr. Ulverston acknowledges that; and his taste in female beauty is very fastidious. However, she is rather too *petite* for my liking."

The careless young-man-of-fashion-air with which Edmund said this, made Lindsay look amazed, and sent Tinie into one of her heartiest fits of laughter.

"So my wise brother is turning connoisseur in feminine perfections, with Mr. Ulverston as his tutor. Nice master — nice pupil. And I suppose you took him to Chester-terrace, that poor little Hope might be 'trotted out' for him, in her new character?"

"No such thing! He never saw her until last week, when the Ansteds were dining at Dr. Reay's with Mr. Ulverston and his cousin Sir Peter — a poor old creature who has a title, but not a shilling, and whom our Mr. Ulverston maintains entirely — generous fellow that he is."

"Here's news! A Sir Peter Ulverston! It sounds well. And I dare say Mr. Ansted thought so?" said Tinie, wickedly.

"I don't know — I only know that I had to go and dine there with him, and so missed the first two acts of a new play written by a friend of mine."

"Bravo, Edmund, your acquaintance is extensive, reaching from baronets to dramatic authors. What sketches of London life we will have from you!"

"Ah! it is indeed a grand life — a delicious life," cried Edmund, with sparkling eye. And as his first affectation of manner wore off, he began to detail with spirit the various excitements of the new world, opened up to him in consequence of his living at the house of a well known man of science, and visiting at that of a rich dabbler in literature like Mr. Ulverston. It was the life of all others the most dazzling to a young and impressible mind — a mingling of the delights of sense and of intellect — mere sensual pleasures appearing refined by the medium through which they were communicated, like intoxicating wine poured from a graceful vase. Edmund, with his sisters gathered round him, dilated long and proudly on all these things. And Lindsay, watching him, only saw that her boy was happy. She desired no more.

But though they all talked fast, and loud, and long, there was scarcely another question put regarding Hope. Six months' new interest creep so fast over the most affectionate of young hearts. Even by the fireside where she had sat so long, none seemed to miss her, or to think of her — save one. And Ninian, apart in his quiet corner, listened in vain for the name which alone he could not take courage to speak.

Sunday morning came, and the grave looks of all the household brought to each the reality that it would be the last Sunday — in fact, the last day when they should meet together as *one* household. It is a solemn thing ever — the first marriage in a family — the first unloosing of that bond which will never be knitted up again on this side the grave. Ninian — as he sat at breakfast-table, which with Edmund's place now filled, looked just as it had looked every Sunday morning for so long — felt a strange heaviness at his heart. Everybody was silent and serious; even the two young brides, not usually given to strong sympathies — especially family sympathies — had a downcast, tearful look. And when Ninian, rising with his customary, "Now, children, get ready for church," faltered a little, apparently with the thought that he would never call the whole band by the one loving name of "children" any more, there was a general giving way. Though the elder brother, according to his wont, tried to make jests out of melancholy, for the sake of brightening up the rest — still while he smiled his eyes were dim. When he said, "God bless us all, and make us one day a happy family, in a place where there are no weddings to cry over," and immediately afterwards sent them all away to dress — everybody knew that it was because his brotherly heart was so full, that he must needs be alone.

He walked to church that day between his twin-sisters, leaving Lindsay to Edmund's care. Very quiet was that walk, along the road trodden Sunday after Sunday by the little family band — a pleasant road, ever and anon affording glimpses of the broad, bright Frith, and of the opposite hills of Fife. And, as they left the sunshine and entered the dark church, very

solemn sounded the hymn which they all sang, sitting together, for the last time, in the same pew where they had come as little children, and had sat year after year, until they grew up into men and women, a goodly line of worshippers. Ninian, in his place next the pew-door, leaned his hand over his eyes. He was thinking of the day when he should meet his father at the gate of heaven, and say — in words that came not irreverently to his reverent mind, "Here am I, with the children thou hast given me." He thought likewise, how sweet it would be to say, "Of all that thou gavest me I have lost none."

The Sunday passed slowly away. Oh, how happy were those summer Sundays at The Gowans! The quiet hour between sermons, spent in cheerful talk by the open windows, or in strolls about the garden; the second service; and then the closing in of the Sabbath-evening, kept as Scottish Sabbaths are — when the family retires into itself, with the certainty that no visitors from without will break upon its leisure and rest.

"I think," said Edmund, as he sat on the grass at Lindsay's feet, under the boughs of the great walnut-tree — "I think, if anything would keep us all good, it would be to remember these quiet Sundays at home. I wish, I wish —

But the boy's aspiration — earnest and sad as his look testified — was broken in upon by unpleasant news.

"Oh, what will become of our wedding to-morrow?" cried Tinie, coming from the house; "Dr. Muir has just sent word he cannot possibly be here, and where will we get another minister?"

This was, indeed, a perplexity, but one out of which

was evolved the thing which Lindsay most earnestly desired.

"I wonder," said Ninian, after a long family consultation, "would John Forsyth come? I would have asked him long ago, but he has grown so strange to us of late since he took to his wandering life. I do not even know if he is in Edinburgh."

"That he is," put in Charlie, who was one of those restless lads who seems to know everything that goes on everywhere; "he holds a fieldpreaching to-night on Bruntsfield Links."

"Come, Edmund, then there is no time to be lost. Let us go."

Edmund, who, despite his passing Sabbatic feelings expended at his sister's feet, had turned and slightly compromised the sanctity of Sunday evening by smoking a cigar over the rose-beds, obeyed with some reluctance. Nevertheless, he did obey, and the two brothers disappeared down the avenue, arm-in-arm.

They were a strong contrast. The firm, world-tried man, in whose face, every year, nay, every month, the hard lines were deepening — lines of passion, struggle, and endurance, indicating, though scarcely betraying, that hard battle of which few are ignorant who have lived past thirty years; — and the slender, beautiful youth. For Edmund was beautiful; he had about him that rare charm which nature gives only to women and poets — a sort of ideal grace, delicate yet not effeminate, since it belongs to no sex. It is, in fact, only a foreshadowing of the angelic likeness which we believe we shall all one day wear, when the body ceases to be the tight swaddling-clothes of the half-developed soul, and becomes

the fair, pliant garment which enrobes without concealing its full beauties.

It was late in the evening when the brothers reached Bruntsfield Links. The shoulders of the great lion of Arthur's Seat were tipped with the last gold of sunset, but along the Links it was twilight. However, at the end nearest Herriot's Hospital and the Old Town, they could distinguish a black mass of thronged people, the edges of the mass becoming scattered and thin, like the outer verge of a nebula. It was the field-preaching.

"I think we are right — that is surely John Forsyth's voice," said Ninian, as they approached the crowd, the outer ring of which was composed of half-curious, half-inattentive auditors; sometimes playing, sometimes listening, according as fragmentary words and sentences reached them from the preaching within the circle.

It was, indeed, John Forsyth's voice — once so youthful, so musical — the same which had echoed above the vast congregation in the old kirk. Its tones had now grown somewhat harsh and coarse with open-air speaking; loud with the vehemence — almost rant — which is the besetting sin of most Scottish ministers. Yet still, despite the comical elements that mingled in the scene, — though the preacher preached from a barrel, and the motley uncouth groups around him bore a similitude to that Wedding-feast, whereto were gathered the lame, the halt, and the blind, — still the fierce earnestness of the declamation, and the utter silence of the people that listened, threw solemnity over all.

Ninian pressed slowly through the close-wedged crowd, until he was near enough to catch the discourse and see the countenance of his old friend. Both words

and look were full of a wild inspiration. Yet the sermon was unlike those he used to preach; the softness and refinement of his eloquence was changed into a plain, rugged speech, suitable for those who were now his audience. At times, even when his own mind led him towards a classic sublimity of language, he would pause and retranslate it into homeliness. Something, too, in the matter as well as manner of his speech was different. The doctrine of love was merging into the doctrine of fear. He was less the tender shepherd, softly calling his sheep into the fold, than the threatening pastor, who would fain drive them in thither whether they chose to go or not.

Yet still this man, standing bareheaded on God's earth, beneath God's heaven, admonishing the people that as there was an earth, so surely was there a heaven and a hell, — could not but impress all with the reality of life, death, and eternity. And when, with the sudden change which the vehemence of such preaching allows, he changed his sermon into prayer — or rather, into an appeal to the Invisible that what he said was true — a cry unto the Omnipotent to make his words strike like arrows into the hearts of his hearers — then, with a sudden impulse and involuntary awe the people all unbonneted, or stood covering their eyes in the attitude of Presbyterian devotion. It was worship in its blindest, rudest form — or so it would have seemed to a Church-of-England congregation; but still it was worship — in many, doubtless, sincere.

And when — some self-constituted precentor having led the psalm — the grand Old Hundredth —

"All people that on earth do dwell,
Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice!"

John Forsyth gave it out couplet by couplet; — and as the echo of his single voice ceased, it was taken up at first faintly and discordantly, until gradually the rude congregation joined, and sent up their great cry into the quiet sky, where a few stars were just peeping — truly, it was a grand and solemn scene!

Then came a pause; the young minister's blessing being almost inaudible, and in the thick-coming darkness nothing being distinguishable save a dim figure with outstretched arms. The worship was over. John Forsyth stepped, or rather staggered, from the barrel which had been his pulpit, into a chair brought by some kindly devotee; the two constituting the only articles of church-furniture required in this temple.

Slowly the multitude began to spread itself, blackening the wide Links; and save for a few stragglers that lingered either out of reverence or curiosity, the minister was left alone. He sat, leaning his covered face upon the back of his chair in a state of utter exhaustion. The few remnants of his audience looked at him, and passed by. He seemed no prophet now.

Ninian Græme, seeing that after this violent exertion the young man was shivering in the damp night air, took off his own plaid and put it over him.

"Don't start so, John; it is only I. You did not think I had been among your hearers?"

John Forsyth muttered some faint reply.

"We expected to meet you here — my brother and I; — this is my brother Edmund, just come home."

The young minister looked at Edmund, and turned hastily away. Then Ninian remembered how fond Rachel had been of the boy, who had used to visit continually

at the house at Musselburgh. He told his brother to walk on before them.

"I have come to ask something of you, John," said Ninian, as they crossed the Links, his friend leaning heavily on his arm. "I would not ask you before, lest you might not like it; but this is a case of emergency. You know I am going to lose my twin-sisters."

"Dying? Well, so much the better for them — as for us all. Must I come and pray over them?"

"God forbid! at least, not in that way. No; I meant that they are going to be married. And I want you, my old friend, to come and give them the marriage blessing."

"Blessings — and marriages! I have to do with none of these things. You forget what I told you of my chosen life — how that I go, like my Master, among publicans and sinners; wherever there is misery, evil, or death. As for this marriage, do not ask me, Ninian. A blessing coming from me would be no blessing at all."

But Ninian soothed and argued with him; contesting with what seemed the two prevailing feelings now rooted in Forsyth's mind — his sense of unworthiness and self-abasement, and the bitter asceticism which made him turn from the sight of everything like worldly happiness.

"But it will not be all happiness with us to-morrow. It is a sorrowful parting with our Ruth and Esther. Lindsay feels it much, I know. And do you remember the last marriage that was to have been in our house, ago, when you were quite a boy, and I little more — how we two were to have been best-men to your cousin?"

"When God took poor Archibald, that is, *happy* Archibald! Oh! Ninian, I wish I were my cousin now,

or had gone with him when I was a boy," sighed John Forsyth; and, in the star-light, a softened grief crossed his face — a grief that seemed almost welcome, tempering its stern repose.

"My sister Lindsay wants you to come. Perhaps you might do her good, you know."

"Your sister?" repeated the young minister, pursuing the current of his thoughts. "Ah, I remember as though it were yesterday, how Archibald lay dying up in the hills, with the congregation all round him, though he had no near friend by except me, a mere boy. He could hardly speak for the blood choking his lungs, but I heard him say one word, and that was 'Lindsay.' Yes! if Lindsay wishes, I must indeed come to-morrow."

And so he gave the promise Ninian wished. They walked together into Edinburgh, parting on the bridge that overlooks the Cowgate.

"Are you not going home, John?"

"Not for many hours yet. I keep my Sabbath-night as the Apostles did, going from house to house. But if you were to see the houses I go to — the Sabbath-night scene. If you only knew what a hell upon earth may be found in some places there!"

He looked down towards the Old Town, and strong disgust was visible on his delicate features, which indicated a nature of almost womanly refinement.

"Why do you go?" was the question that rose to Ninian's lips, but was unspoken. He knew its answer well. And while he watched his friend, he saw how the look of disgust passed, and was sublimed into an aspect strong enough to daunt the wicked, holy enough to sustain the weak. He knew that the young man was fitted to be one of those servants whose service is to go

out in the highways and hedges, and compel souls to come in.

"God bless you, John Forsyth," said Ninian, grasping his friend's hand. "Your lot is not light, nor mine either, but we will both be grey-headed men some time, and then we shall know our trials were all for good."

So they parted, the young missionary disappearing down the nearest wynd, while Ninian Græme passed on and went his way.

CHAPTER XIX.

THERE is something very touching, home-like, and beautiful in a Scottish marriage, which converts the household-hearth into an altar where the bride and bridegroom plight their troth, quietly and solemnly, in the midst of their own people. This sudden changing of the family-room into a temple, of the family group into a circle of reverent worshippers, is not without its sanctity — perhaps deeper than the custom which brings the whirl of carriages and the stares of church-door crowds as necessary adjuncts upon the solemnities of such a time. But either form may be viewed from either side, and outward things signify little, so that the marriage-vow be taken truly and worthily — not only in the sight of man but of God.

In the parlour of The Gowans, — Ninian would never have it called "the drawing-room," because its furnishings were so plain, — in that simple room was gathered the first marriage party which had ever stood beneath the roof of the Græmes. It consisted solely of their own family, except Mrs. Forsyth, who came with her son — and the father and mother of the two Frasers. Well-pleased, gallant-looking bridegrooms they were, while the twin-sisters were bonnie brides. Each and all were of the good, comely, easy-going race of ordinary men and women, who are born, marry, and die — live a contented harmless life — help to people the earth, and then leave their quiet dust in its bosom, having

done all they can, and no more. Perhaps they are happiest, in this world at least!

The marriage was very simple — so Ninian had desired. He did not think it right or needful that his sisters, going portionless from his roof to another not above their own sphere, should make any display in dress. All were in plain white — the proper wedding garment; even Lindsay assumed it for once, though her worn face and thin figure made her look in it more like a shrouded nun than a bridal guest. But her determination lay between this and her customary black dress; and, for once, no arguments could move her.

So, all white-stoled together, his four sisters stood before Ninian's eyes. A few minutes more — and he had given two of the number from out of his keeping for ever. He did it — rather sadly, — and yet with content, for he had fulfilled his duty by them, at last bestowing them worthily, and according to their hearts' desire. Only when having kissed them with a brotherly tenderness, he resigned them to a nearer claim, — he felt glad to have his little Tinie drawing close to him with a loving, wilful face that said, "For me, I will not go away, and nothing shall make me!"

The marriage was over. John Forsyth had made it as brief as he could, with little or no exhortations. These things were not his portion. He was, or wished to be, wholly absorbed in his Apostleship. From his look it seemed as if a lifetime had swept by him since he had been the young man who, tossed by agonising passion, had come and said to Ninian, "It is all over now!" Brief and fierce had been the trial — utter and complete its *closing*! He would never know the same, or anything

like it, henceforth. He was a minister in God's service, devoted wholly and for evermore.

After he had closed the ceremony, John Forsyth went aside and talked with Lindsay. Their speech lasted a long time. It might have been, most likely it was, concerning that Kingdom where there are neither marriage nor death; neither struggle, temptation, nor loss. And to that Kingdom, beyond and above all hindrances, they two were now bound.

We hear it, we read it written, though in youth we cannot, will not believe it, — that even in the most perfect human love is no continual rest; that if we had it we should not be satisfied therewith; that nothing can satisfy the soul's desiring — except God. *He can*, they say — they, the wisest and holiest among us, while we, in our bitter youth, are often very unwise and very unholy. Still, let us believe this truth. Oh, ye suffering ones who read this page — and many such must read it, for the world is full of woe — have patience! If we could once get a clear sight into that Kingdom afar off, everything near in this world would crumble into ashes. It would not signify whether we had trod lonely through thorns, or been led softly amidst pleasant places, when our eyes were once fixed, firmly and eternally *there*. And such a blissful ending is possible, ay, and must be, or the just God is unjust, and has let us suffer in vain. Oh, my brethren — oh, my sisters — let us have patience and believe!

It may be that John Forsyth and Lindsay Græme were the most to be envied of all the group — in whom this marriage had stirred up many secret troubles, as every marriage must. After its close, when the two young couples had departed, all the party wandered

about the house in a most unsettled state, trying to make the day move on like any other day, but quite unable to beguile themselves into such a state of composure.

"You'll not go away, John? It is not often we have a talk together, old friend!" said Ninian, linking his arm in that of Forsyth, and walking with him up and down the little avenue. It was good for both, this long converse together, since Ninian himself was in no quiet mood. During all the marriage service he had seen, as in a dream, a little figure, in bridal white, with the long falling curls and sweet eyes, to whom he said no longer "my child," but "my wife." And the intense longing which this dream brought, warned him that it had need be repressed, or he would never have strength to battle with the years that must pass before it could become reality.

He talked to John Forsyth about the things which now filled up the sole interest of the young man's existence. He led him to unfold his wanderings during the last few months. They extended over Scotland and the north of England — in cities, towns, villages — everywhere that there seemed opportunity for a preacher, or where there was a chance of his being listened to.

"Sometimes they will not listen — they hoot me, pelt me with stones — an olden persecution, which seems almost sanctified — I try to rejoice in all. And again sometimes circumstances chance that make me feel my labour is not altogether in vain. One happened not long ago."

"Tell me of it."

"I was near Durham, about to preach in the open air; it is hard to do that in England, for they call one

Ranter and Methodist, and Latterday Saint; they never could understand why a Scottish Kirk-minister should worship God beneath no roof but His own sky. What scorn and reviling I have had! But I take all, and glory in all."

"And of this particular preaching you mentioned?" said Ninian, trembling to see the religious zeal, almost amounting to religious madness, which glittered in the eyes of the young enthusiast.

"The sermon was partly for warning, partly for charity, — to get help for the families of some wretches who had perished in a coal-mine. This time I wanted to have hearers among the rich as well as the poor. But people mocked me, for there had come a troop of actors into Durham, and plays were pleasanter and more amusing than preaching. So I thought I would fight with Satan in his stronghold. I wrote to the theatre-company, dwelling on all those awful truths which a minister of God should never spare, calling upon them to come and hear me, if by any means they might be snatched as brands from the burning."

Ninian looked grave; his calmer mind did not quite coincide with the ultra-fanaticism of his friend. But he was too wise to argue, so he only asked "What came of this adventure?"

"It touched the heart of some poor Magdalen in Jezebel guise; there came an anonymous answer, enclosing money for me to use or to expend in charity. There has come more since, addressed to me in Edinburgh; so the impression was not merely momentary. You may see here," said he, taking a letter out of his pocket; "the poor sinner asks that 'John Forsyth

will remember her in his prayers.' So I will, God knows."

Mr. Græme looked at the paper; the writing was large, uncertain, coarse — either from the emotion of the writer, or her wish to disguise her hand. Yet something in it struck him as if he had seen it before. But he had not time to consider the matter, for while John Forsyth was yet speaking, Ninian's attention was fixed by a carriage at the gate. Could it, indeed, be — Oh! strange weakness of human love, that at any moment conjures up the possibility it most desires!

No — it was not "the child." There was no need for him to spring to the gate with such rapidity. He only met there the very last person he was thinking of — Mr. Ulverston.

"You will imagine I always appear unexpectedly," said the latter, with his gay air; "to be sure, I am a most restless, ubiquitous individual in my comings and goings. But, tell me, am I welcome?" added he, with the charming, frank effrontery that seems to run in the current of Hibernian blood; and, by advantage of which, Mr. Ulverston could do and say almost anything.

"Welcome? Yes!" answered Ninian, perhaps himself succumbing to the attractive powers of this young man — perhaps with the quick concatenation of ideas, reflecting that Mr. Ulverston came from London, visited at Chester-terrace, and might bring tidings which were enough to make the most repulsive person welcome unto Ninian Græme.

"I am too late to be a wedding-guest, I fear; and yet I have travelled post-haste, in order to succeed in my mission. It is to bring a present to your two fair brides from our sweet little friend Miss Ansted."

"Thank you. It was a long journey."

"Oh, nothing! I would do twice as much to pleasure a fair lady — especially when one sees the tears in her eyes, as I did on Saturday night — when, by some delay or other, she found her pretty present was sure to be too late. So I volunteered to act as messenger — the fair one accepted my offer — and here I am with my jewels. But where are the brides? Gone? She will be so disappointed, poor little Hope!"

Ninian started to hear her Christian name on a stranger's lips. But in a little while he remembered that it was only Mr. Ulverston's careless, familiar manner of speaking of all women.

"I am sorry," he said. "It is very kind of Miss Ansted, and likewise of you. Our brides have left us some hours since; but will you come in and see my sisters, Lindsay and — Christina?" Uttering the latter name, Ninian could not forbear a close scrutiny of Mr. Ulverston — who, however, appeared perfectly unconcerned.

"Then she has not disappeared behind the clouds of matrimony, my fair 'Cynthia of the minute,' as we used to say at the Gare-Loch. It will be quite a pleasure to have another laugh with the blithe Miss Tinie. And I have a long message to deliver to her from her friend. Then, may I go at once to claim Miss Græme's hospitality? — that is, if you will take me in, for I must return to London to-morrow."

The sedate Ninian was fairly puzzled by the mercurial temperament of this gentleman, who could travel some 900 miles there and back to please a fancy of one young girl, or, perhaps — as his brotherly caution whispered — to flirt a little more with another. But

there seemed no harm in the man — only volatility. Mr. Græme set the question by as beyond his own comprehension, and merely tried to fulfil the duties of kindness towards one who evidently took so much pains to please.

"Come! my sisters will be glad of a guest to drive their dulness away. Suppose we all return to the house together." And Ninian remembered his friend, who had stood apart during this new arrival. "Mr. Ulverston — Mr. John Forsyth. You may recollect walking one day to the house of Mrs. Forsyth, at Musselburgh."

"Musselburgh!" Mr. Ulverston slightly knitted his brows. "Oh, yes! a curious old town at first sight. But I have no further acquaintance with it."

He looked at John Forsyth, and John Forsyth at him. The two men seemed to scan one another narrowly, with some vague interest. Instinctively both appeared to discern the fact that in every sense their two characters were dissimilar, and their lives as wide asunder as the poles. They merely bowed, and took no further notice of each other.

Tinie and her former swain met — as such light lovers were sure to meet — without the least shade of embarrassment on either side; and resumed their old badinage with infinite gratification. Edmund, too, whom London society had smitten with the new desire to cultivate his wit, said such sparkling things that Lindsay marvelled at the brilliancy of her boy. They were a merrier party than could have been expected for that most dolorous time to the bride's family, the evening of a wedding-day.

Hope's presents were displayed — a few simple

ornaments, — valuable as tokens of remembrance, nothing more.

"I thought they would have been much richer jewellery than this," observed Ulverston, unable to restrain his surprise. "Such a wealthy man as Mr. Ansted seems — his house so well appointed! Your friend is looked upon as an heiress, I assure you. This is quite extraordinary."

"Not at all," said Ninian. "Miss Ansted knew my sisters would have no use for expensive ornaments. She has judged rightly, as she always does."

"Certainly. A young head, to have so much sense in it; — too great sense almost for so lovely a woman," was Mr. Ulverston's half-sarcastic reply. For which Miss Christina took him to task in a bantering argument that lasted a quarter of an hour.

Mrs. Forsyth, somewhat scandalised by the light manners of young people of modern days, rose, with her son, to take leave.

"I had forgotten the letter you gave me, John," Ninian said, with some feeling of compunction for the manner his own sympathies had passed away concerning the same. "If it is no secret, let me tell Lindsay the story before you go."

He did so, and all listened, even Mr. Ulverston, who was the only one to comment, with the slight sneer into which his gaiety sometimes merged; —

"A very wonderful, almost incredible piece of generosity in an actress. They are generally either improvident or avaricious — a worthless set, as I tell Edmund here, when he attacks me with his dramatic mania. Most of these stage-goddesses are of very inferior clay — low-born, only half-educated. That epistle

seems addressed in a wretched scrawl," added he, rising to hand it from Lindsay to Mr. Forsyth, and carelessly glancing at it the while. But in so doing his eye grew fixed; his smiling face darkened.

"May I look at the *billet doux* of this your anonymous correspondent, Mr. Forsyth?"

"And I, too," cried Tinie, peeping over the guest's shoulder. "'*From a wronged Sinner*,' — quite a paradox! But how deliciously romantic! — do you not think so, Mr. Ulverston?"

"Absurd! Some foolish story or other, to take in credulous people," answered the young man, and grasped the paper as if he wished to tear it in pieces.

"Here's a novelty! Mr. Ulverston in a passion!"

"I could almost be so, to see how easily deceived are benevolent, amiable folk like your fair ladyship. But I — who, unluckily for myself, know more of the world than does Mr. Forsyth, or than your excellent sister there — would strongly advise you not to pursue this interesting heroine any further."

"You seem greatly to dislike her indeed. She might be an enemy — or, perhaps, an acquaintance of yours? Possibly you recognise the hand?" said the mischievous Tinie.

This time Mr. Ulverston crimsoned with real indignation.

"My acquaintance does not lie among such people," said he, haughtily. "I merely wished to warn my friends against bestowing interest and compassion upon impostors — I say again, impostors."

"Now that is making mountains of molehills. Listen," added she, appealing to the rest. "Here is Mr. Ulverston's definition of the term impostor: — a woman

who sends money for charity, in such a way that it is impossible to find out anything about her, except from the widely-inclusive signature of 'A Sinner!'"

"A *wronged* 'sinner,'" added Ninian, who, without paying much attention to the conversation, had taken up the letter which Mr. Ulverston had angrily thrown aside. As he examined it attentively, a light flashed across his mind, vivid enough to make him oblivious of all the talking kept up around him.

Could it be possible that this letter came from the lost Rachel? He had scarcely ever seen her handwriting, for, with a consciousness of that inferiority which frequently abides with people who in early life have been uneducated, she was very chary of using her pen. When she did write, it was no formed hand, but an uncertain, half-intelligible scrawl; therefore, even if John Forsyth had ever seen it, his not recognising it was no unlikely circumstance. But Ninian's quick perceptions were ready to catch at anything that could afford a clue to a subject that frequently rested painfully on his kindly heart.

He did not mention his suspicions, but made some excuse to go to his study, and compare this melancholy line with one or two notes which were the sole relics that remained of his acquaintance with Rachel. The resemblance was striking, but not conclusive; and even if it had been, what further trace was there of this unfortunate, who was indeed, in the sight of man, a "wronged sinner?" But oh! how much heavier than the sin had been the wrong!

Ninian sat a long time in sorrowful meditation, at the end of which he had arranged something like a consecutive plan for seeking out and aiding Rachel. In so

thinking he received the balm which all good hearts ever find — oblivion for many restless fears and vain desires which had haunted him that day. Nevertheless, as in putting by the blotted scrawl which John Forsyth had left in his hands, it touched the packet of Hope's small, neat letters, his last thought was a mingled thanksgiving and a prayer for his own tender darling, that under all chances, whether or not her future was given to his keeping, it might be ever peaceful and bright! And under this feeling, that the division between these two and their fate, might be clearly indicated even in the veriest trifles, he actually put Rachel's letters in a separate drawer, lest the taint of their misery and wrong should even in fancy approach the precious paper over which the child's soft hands had passed. It was a conceit almost puerile; but it showed how deeply, amidst all the strength of his outer character, lay this inexpressible, all-softening tenderness, which had nestled itself in the core of Ninian's heart.

When he rejoined his family, he found with surprise that the erratic Mr. Ulverston was gone.

"He certainly is the most eccentric and unaccountable of mankind!" cried Tinie, slightly annoyed at the defection of her cavalier. "He suddenly discovered that he had promised to sleep at a friend's house; and thither he accordingly went, in a perfect fever of punctuality, — so great, that he would not allow us to disturb you. But he promised without fail to reappear in the morning.

However, Mr. Ulverston's promise "without fail," was about as much to be relied on as those of most Irishmen; who, Heaven bless them! are always ready for any deed of kindliness or courtesy — *at the time* —

but have the shortest memories and most convenient consciences in the world.

The Græmes never heard of their vanished guest again, until they learned from Hope Ansted's next letter that he was flourishing in London. However, Tinie's little vanity soon recovered its wound, and she consoled herself for Mr. Ulverston's neglect by changing his cognomen of "Desdichado" into the still more appropriate one of "The Flash of Lightning."

CHAPTER XX.

The summer waned — the winter came — and still in the now narrowed circle at The Gowans all things went on in their accustomed round; Tinie, appearing amid Edinburgh gaieties under the auspices of her married sisters, became a planet that showed its light rarely enough in the home-atmosphere. Reuben, too, growing up into man's estate, had quenched his inquiring mind in the humbler pursuits of a physician's pupil, and was only visible to his family on divers Sundays and holidays. And Charlie, who was always a wild sort of laddie and no scholar, began to be perpetually missing among the ships of Leith harbour, and to hint darkly that there was no life like a sailor's. Thus gradually Lindsay and Ninian saw their young nestlings trying their wings, ready to fly out into the wide world.

Many an evening as they sat — the brother and sister — by their winter fireside, where of all the merry voices the sole voice remaining was that very gruff one of Charlie's — Ninian began to have dreams of the empty places being filled with a dearer household still. Therefore he did not look half so dreary as Lindsay did, when month after month marked the decadence of that little republic of which she had been the guardian.

Somehow, as time passed, an irresistible longing drew Ninian towards London, to see once more the child who was so dear to him. It was only to see her, to watch her from the depths of his dumb love — for still that

feeling which men have, and which they call "honourable pride," warned him that he must keep silence for a while longer. He comforted himself with her letters, so frank, so full of an affection which was not love, yet which in a nature like hers might easily become such. It saved him from fear, it gave him hope; he was content, if not happy.

Once, during these months, he had been on the point of flying to the child. Trouble had fallen upon her. The two boys, who for years had tormented poor Ninian to such an extent, were now removed where they could torment no more. Soon after that grand era, the first marriage in the Græme family, both the young Ansteds had died of fever at school.

"I have no brothers now but you," wrote Hope sorrowfully; for though the tie had been to her hitherto little more than a name, still Ninian knew she had sometimes indulged dreams of seeing the two tiresome wilful boys grow up into good men. However, Heaven forbade, and poor Hope was left brotherless.

Ninian longed to go and comfort her, but something in her letter, and in Mr. Ansted's, forbade. The latter needed no consolation; he had never much cared about the boys, and all his epistle to Mr. Græme, except a sentence of decent sorrow, was filled up with an account of their elegant funeral. So the poor little fellows were disposed of, and Hope Ansted became her father's sole heiress.

Except this, there was apparently no change in her life. Her letters reached The Gowans regularly as ever, sometimes cheerful, sometimes grave. At last, in the early spring-time, there came a silence longer than usual; and then Ninian's heart began to yearn over his

darling — so wildly — that he made an excuse of business, or rather, for he was above all subterfuges, engaged in a business which he knew would call him to London. He was not tied hand and foot to his office now, for Ninian Græme was growing a prosperous man, and need not toil as he did in the days of his adversity.

So one day, having startled Lindsay by the news of his journey, and comforted her by the thought that by him she would have new tidings of her boy Edmund, Mr. Græme went off to London.

He had not been there for many years — not since he was a very young man. He never liked its bustle and confusion, and much preferred his beloved Edinburgh, lying year by year in aristocratic, dreamy sleep. As he drove through the streets, anxious to fulfil before nightfall the business on which he had come, so that, duty being done, no thought might distract the morrow's joy, — he yet could not keep himself from fancying that every light, small figure was that which used to trip beside him many a morning, winter and summer, as he walked into Edinburgh. One little day more, — and he should see it again! His heart, so manly, yet so simple — so strong, yet so pure — swelled within him, like that of a youth waiting for the footsteps of his first love.

I know that this is a rare case — that there is hardly any man who, living unmarried for thirty years, has not drained dry, or else changed into poison, the cup of love that was given him to be the sustenance of his existence. I know that Ninian may be smiled at, as being that strange anomaly — a man with a womanly heart — a heart which, despite all its world-scars, was

at the depth tender and pure as any maiden's. There are such, thank God! but they are few indeed.

Ninian reached London at noon, and by night had diligently accomplished all his business. He first thought that he would go and see Kenneth Reay, but he persuaded himself that the hour was too late, and that he had better wait until the morrow. Now that his work was done, restlessness took possession of him. He set off on a ramble through the frosty, moonlit streets, whither he hardly knew, until he found himself inquiring of a beneficent policeman the way to the Regent's Park.

It was close at hand; the quiet esplanade glittering in the moonlight — a pretty place is the Regent's Park, at night — ay, even the Cockney Coliseum, and the long terrace-range, where, on still summer nights, one can hear one's feet echo, and scent hawthorn and lilac-trees at every step. Even Ninian thought it not so bad, and, with an almost childish fancy, paused to wonder whose little feet might possibly have touched the pavement where his now followed, perhaps at only a few hours' interval. It is strange what follies people in his state of mind lean to; how, lingering near those whom we have long hallowed in our hearts, we fancy the very trees and stones, feeling the same influence as ourselves, must "prate of their whereabouts."

Ninian thought he would walk on and see the house where the Ansteds lived; it would prevent his losing time over that search in the morning. He asked for Chester-terrace, feeling it strange to speak the address he had written so often. As he neared the house, this strong, clear-headed, clear-hearted man felt himself growing weak as an infant. He trembled to

think how, in a year's absence, he had idealised his little pet into a beloved mistress, and was sinking from his calm elder-brotherhood into the veriest lover that ever trembled before the idol of his heart.

He came to the house, and hesitatingly glanced up, as if he expected to see her shadow on the blind. There was no shadow, for there was no light within. In the closed window was a staring printed board — "This House to Let."

Ninian started back in blank dismay. His first thought was that he must have been deceived in the number or in the terrace. But no! he was not likely to have forgotten either. It must have been the house they had lived in — they were gone, and it was empty.

He read the board over and over again, mechanically, until he at last noticed the "Inquire within." He knocked with an uncertain hand — remembering whose fingers must have often rested on the same place. There was an apparition of one of those starved-looking women whom one continually sees as care-takers of empty houses — poor slip-shod creatures, generally with two or three children, which are thankfully hidden under any roof. She came, holding the door ajar, and peering out by the light of her farthing candle, until she saw that the summoner was not a thief, but a gentleman.

"This house is to be let?"

"Yes, sir. For cards to view, apply at —" and she began quoting the notice outside.

"I don't want to take the house. I wish to inquire about its former tenants. They must have left suddenly. *Where* are they gone?"

"You're not the first as has wanted to know that," said the woman, with a grin. I've answered a score of them — butchers, bakers, and all; — that it's no use coming bothering me — I knows nothing!"

With that she slammed the door in Ninian's face, leaving him struck with a pain so intense, that he stood for some minutes on the steps before he could collect his thoughts — visions of Hope starving, homeless, or enduring the horrors of a bankrupt household — Hope — his delicate-minded, gentle girl. He would go and snatch her out of her father's very sight, rather than she should be tortured or tainted thus.

Something he must learn, and at once. He had persuaded himself that it was too late to go to Dr. Reay's; but now he bethought himself that the Professor was in the habit of studying till midnight, and they two would talk better alone. He set off briskly, and St. Pancras clock was booming out eleven as he knocked at his old friend's door.

It was a year since he had seen Kenneth Reay, during which time the Professor had, through some valuable astronomical discoveries, risen high in worldly honour. Ninian expected to find him changed; but no! the tall gowned figure that opened the hall-door wore the same awkward, half-slovenly aspect, only a little older and more careworn.

"Is that you, Edmund? You are early home to-night. I wish you would always keep the same hours!" sighed the worthy man, in a tone of kindliest reproof, as he looked out into the dark.

"It is not Edmund — it is I. Do you not know me, Kenneth?"

Reay let the candle fall, so extreme was his amazement and agitation.

"I did not know you — my eyes are often half-blind when I take them from my work. You'll forgive me, Græme? I am so glad to see you," cried the Professor in a hurried, broken voice, as he dragged his friend to a room at the further end of the hall, where, amidst books and astronomical instruments, and heaped-up papers of calculations, the man of science was wearing his sleep away.

He pushed Ninian into a chair, stirred the fire, tossed half a dozen folios down in his extreme restlessness, and at last said with some agitation,

"It's surely nothing gone wrong that brings you here? They are all well at The Gowans?"

"All — which means only Lindsay and Charlie. Tinie is at Portobello with Esther and Ruth. We are every one of us flourishing. And how is it with you and yours? You are a great man now, eh! Kenneth?"

Kenneth shook his head and smiled rather sadly. "Nothing to what I desire to be, if I had time. But the college occupies me in the day, and at night I have tried my eyes so much, that they will not stand much work. It is very hard! I was obliged to give up just now in the very middle of this." And half-sighing, he pointed to an enormous calculation of most diminutive figures — a perfect arithmetical building. "I thought I would have finished it before the lad Edmund came home."

"Is he often out — and do you always sit up for him?"

"*There* is nobody else to do it, or my aunt would

know of his being late, and then he would have no peace, poor young fellow."

"I fear he has been much trouble to you," answered Ninian, his brotherly alarms putting out of his mind for the time being the one sole question which had driven him hither. "I hope he is not going wrong?"

"Oh, no! He is only gay and cheerful, like — the rest of your family. He reminds me of — them — very often in his looks and ways. Even if he did rather discompose me, I could not find in my heart to say a hard word to Edmund."

Ninian looked affectionately at the Professor, who was leaning against the mantel-piece, his fingers unconsciously pressing down the lids upon his hot aching eyes. "God bless you, Kenneth; you are a worthy soul." And then no longer able to control his anxiety, he asked Reay the plain, abrupt question, "Had he seen anything of the Ansteds?"

"Not much."

"But you know where they are living?"

"I forgot exactly; but my aunt or Edmund can tell you to-morrow. Somewhere in the Regent's Park, I think. It is a fine house with such a grand horizon for astronomical observation. I wish my house had anything like it."

"What, do you not know that they have left? I have reason to suppose they are in great difficulties. I ought to find them out at once. Can't you use your worldly wisdom for once and help me, my good fellow?" Ninian cried, with a degree of impatience which the next moment he regretted having betrayed, and added,

"I am very anxious about Miss Ansted for Lindsay's sake, and Tinie's — they were both so fond of her."

"Yes; I remember. She has come up and talked to me of the days by Gare-Loch-side many a time. A gentle, kind little thing! She is not in trouble, is she?"

"I cannot tell, and I must find out. Would Edmund know where she lives? Where is Edmund gone to-night?"

" I — I scarcely ever ask. Stay, I think he is at Mr. Ulverston's; and Mr. Ulverston might be able to give you some information, for whenever I go to the Ansteds, I always meet him there. A kind sort of young man! though light-minded and uncertain. I wonder if he ever will return my nineteen volumes of 'Philosophical Transactions?'" .

Ninian wasted no more words, but giving a cordial promise that he would return next day, obtained from his old friend Mr. Ulverston's address, and so departed. With unwearied patience, though he had travelled all night, and walked all day, did he hasten through the moonlit deserts of London squares, as they appeared a short time before midnight. At last he found himself at Mr. Ulverston's door. It was a handsome bachelor's lodging in Pall-Mall, and through the slightly-opened windows of the drawing-room came sounds which indicated a gay bachelor's party going on within.

Ninian's Scottish reserve made him pause, with a certain dislike of intruding among them at that hour; but to relieve the wretched suspense of his mind he would have conquered any impediments. He presented himself before the merry group.

It was a group such as London literary society can

ways furnish to dazzle youth withal. Brilliancy, without positive vice; wit, at times polished to ultra-refinement, and again just coarse enough to attract lower natures, or the lowest half of all natures; good-fellowship warmed though scarce besotted, by the influence of wine and that dearly-beloved weed without which your modern geniuses seem to think it impossible to exist. Yet, *par parenthèse*, how would Shakspeare or Dante have looked with a cigar in his mouth?

In the midst of this sparkling convivial meeting stood the Scotsman, his face grave with restraint and anxiety, an apparition as unpleasant as those which the Greeks used to introduce at their feasts as a *memento mori*.

"Mr. Græme, upon my soul! What fortunate north wind blew you hither? Or did you rise up like a ghost to avenge the *manes* of all your countrymen whom my friend here has been abusing so infernally for the last half-hour? Mr. —, Mr. Ninian Græme."

And then Ninian bowed in response to this introduction to one whom he knew by repute as the keenest satirist and greatest intellectual profligate of the day.

"Edmund — my dear fellow — rouse up! Here is your brother — a messenger of no ill news, I trust."

"Have no fear, my boy!" said Ninian, hastily, as the young man — he looked, indeed, quite a young man now — rose from the arm-chair where he had been lolling, and walked — rather unsteadily, though with the unsteadiness of one bewildered with excitement more than wine — to meet his elder brother. He did not say, or look, "I am glad to see you." There was a slight confusion in his manner, as if he were half

ashamed to have a plain-looking, travel-disordered man introduced as his relative to such a brilliant society.

On his part, Ninian saw with pain how constrained was the greeting — how haggard the boyish face was growing, while the whole mien had acquired a mannish forwardness unbecoming in one so young. Edmund did not look like the same lad who had used to lean on his elder brother's shoulder in the pleasant Sunday evenings at The Gowans.

But whatever Ninian thought, he made no remark; and just then there was throbbing in his heart a fear closer even than that for his brother.

He sat down amidst this goodly company of men, chiefly consisting of the wits of Young England, whose daring, frothy pen would cause the heavy humorists of King George's time to shudder in their graves. To and fro, darting zig-zag across the table, like flashes of harmless lightning, came a perpetual succession of jokes and repartees — some good, some bad. If any unfortunate wight started a serious topic, it was quenched amid this cross-fire of small artillery. Every subject, however high and holy, served as a target for practising on. There was nothing said that was positively evil, irreverent, or foul, but still it was an unhealthy atmosphere. Though Ninian, with his keen sense of humour and his cheerful temperament, would at any other time have had a degree of pleasure in sitting by and listening to this brilliant set, yet he felt that to speak, almost to think of Hope Ansted among them, was profanation.

He let half an hour slip by before he could bring *him*self to ask the question, for which alone he had

visited Mr. Ulverston. When at last he put it, it was in a lower tone, and to Edmund.

"I have not seen the Ansteds for an age," answered the boy, yawning. "I don't care to go there. Hope is pretty, certainly, but that's all; and the old father is such a confounded bore. Ask Ulverston, he is often with them, though I wonder how he stands it."

Ninian, half-scorning himself for the ridiculous sensitiveness that was overcoming his manhood, put the question point-blank to his host.

"Have you any idea whither the Ansteds have removed?"

Mr. Ulverston abruptly set down the wine he was just raising to his lips. In doing so, he even spilled a little, as if he had been startled. He gave a quick glance out of the corners of his brilliant eyes, then pulled his moustache with a lordly air:

"My dear Græme, is it possible you don't know? I thought you were a greater friend of the family than even myself. Nay — don't be impatient. I'll tell you all about them presently. Meanwhile — this claret is not so bad. A glass with me?"

"They must have left Chester-terrace rather suddenly?" pursued Ninian.

"I rather think that was my doing, though the old father seemed not unwilling. But Hope was growing ill and pale; so I used my influence — as, indeed, she begged me — and they took a house some twelve miles out in the country."

"Where?" said Ninian, closing his teeth upon the one syllable and trying to keep his colour from flashing and his hands from clenching. He had not thought

there was so much of a young man's jealous blood left in him.

"Where! That is a secret safe in my keeping," laughed Mr. Ulverston, in an under tone. "To tell the truth, they wished to live retired, partly because of Hope's enfeebled health, partly because —"

"Mr. Ansted may be in difficulties," bluntly said Ninian.

"In difficulties? Ridiculous! I know it to be impossible, for he has confided to me all his affairs. A gentleman — or rather, a person with a gentleman's income," added he, with the most polite of sneers, "may find himself at times short of cash, especially when he has a turn for speculation. But Mr. Ansted's connexions are enormous — and attractive, too. To my certain knowledge, our pretty Hope could be a Baroness if she chose."

"She has not chosen then?"

"I suspect not. Possibly she has her own reasons for objecting." And there was upon the young man's face a smile that cut Ninian to the heart.

"However, you must not mention this," continued Mr. Ulverston, confidentially. "Her father himself is not aware of the fact; but I know the respect in which Miss Ansted holds you. Well, when do you think of seeing them?"

"You forget that my first question is unanswered. Twelve miles from London is rather a wide direction. Still, we lawyers are acute in finding out mysteries; I may perhaps dive to the bottom of yours."

The quick flashing anger which sometimes, on the slightest apparent grounds, darkened Mr. Ulverston's good humour, appeared now. "Dare you —" said he, and

then in a changed and pleasantly-mocking tone, he laughed off his words. "Dare you, really? Suppose you should come up empty-handed, and get drowned before you reached the surface? No, my dear Mr. Græme, don't trouble yourself; there is no mystery at all. I don't deal in such. I'm a fellow transparent as glass. There!"

And smiling with an air of frank good temper, he wrote the address on one of his own cards, and handed it to Ninian.

It was a feeling, perhaps not courtly, but yet irresistible, which made Mr. Græme, having glanced on the card on which was printed "Mr. Ulverston," and beneath written in delicate flourishes, as if the writer amused himself by playing with the name, "Hope Ansted, Marylands, Arlington," to copy the address in his own pocket-book, and then return the card.

"— Nay, I don't want it. I know the place well enough by this time," said Mr. Ulverston gaily.

Ninian took up the card and put it in the fire. He felt a savage pleasure in seeing it crackle and blaze. Soon after, he rose up to say farewell.

"What, have we frightened you away already? Edmund, surely you are not vanishing too?"

"He can do as he pleases," said Ninian, for once neglectful even of the company of his favourite brother. But Edmund, seeing the pale, disturbed, weary look that Ninian wore, felt a slight conscience-sting, and followed him away.

"Shall I drive you down to Arlington to-morrow? — that is, the day after; for I was there yesterday, and must not wear out my welcome. Will you come?"

"I thank you, no," said Ninian. He would rather

have never met Hope at all than gone to meet her accompanied by Mr. Ulverston.

All the way home, Edmund talked, as he had now learned to talk, in the reckless, witty fashion of the set among which he moved, until, passing under a street lamp, he looked at his silent brother.

"By — Jove!" he cried, repressing a less harmless expletive, which was not yet quite familiarised to his boyish lips. "You are not ill, brother Ninian? What makes you look so harassed, and so old?"

"I have not been in bed these two nights, and have travelled or worked all day. And as for looking old — why, I must expect it, you know. Never mind me, my boy."

Edmund pressed his arm with a feeling of compunction and tenderness. He ceased his light chatter, and walked on, very quiet. Perhaps he was thinking how while he lived so merrily his elder brother toiled. Perhaps too the affectionate smile and the gentle "my boy," made him consider over his own worthiness of the same. But certain it is, that as they reached the Professor's door, Edmund parted from Ninian with a good-by so loving and so humble, that he, sore as his heart was, drew comfort from the thought that his young brother at least was growing up to be his pride, and, perhaps, his stay.

END OF VOL. I.

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VOL. II.

THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY.

A NOVEL.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "JOHN HALIFAX."

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1858.

THE HEAD OF THE FAMILY.

VOL. II.

CHAPTER I.

It was a soft February morning, with a warm mist going up from the grass, and breaking at last into sunshine so bright that the air felt just like summer. The season had been remarkably early that year; and though the second calendar month was yet within a day or two of its closing, the birds and the budding leaves seemed bent on putting all almanacs to shame, and making everybody believe that it was really spring. The farmers shook their heads and talked about blights and frosts that must surely follow this unnatural weather, but children basked in the sunshine, and young people felt their pulses beat in response to the glad pulses of the spring.

Ninian's was one of those. It is strange, for how many years, and through what struggles, pains, and cares, the faint inward spirit of hope and cheerfulness will remain alive. Often, a blithe bright morning — a mere gleam of sunshine — will make one feel, if not happy, at least eager to receive happiness. It is the constant aspiring of the flame, which ever tends upward as long as there is any flame at all.

It must have been a sore-wounded, crushed spirit, indeed, that would not have risen lighter on such a sweet spring-day. Ninian, walking along the country road where the railway-train had deposited him, lifting his head to drink the fresh air, smiling at the little children, who, as English village-children always do, dropped curtseys to "the gentleman," — Ninian, I say, would hardly have been recognised for the same man who had tossed all night on his weary bed, and risen haggard and sleepless, uncertain whether he should not at once rush back to Edinburgh, and dull his brain and heart into forgetfulness amidst the toils of his profession.

He did not think so, however, when the soft fresh air stole into his spirit; something like the influence of one who had come to him like a pleasant spring-day — a garland of young leaves — a bunch of violets — he had called her by all these pretty pet-names in times gone by. Mr. Græme was not very sentimental by nature, but an unwonted weakness stole over him as he thought of these things. For the time being he would gladly have put off his worldly self with all its honours, duties, and cares, to sit in Corydon-and-Phyllis-fashion with the child beside him, listening to the larks that now sang so merrily over his head, forgetting everything except the love he bore his darling — which made him almost a boy again, for love so unselfish and pure is ever young.

It was a lonely country road, dotted with mansions here and there, and he was puzzled in finding out Marylands. At last he gained the information that it was the next house which boasted of a lodge and a laurel hedge. The green laurel leaves soon glittered in

his sight. In another minute he would look upon his beloved, his heart's desire! He paused a little, thinking how he should announce himself, and whether he should ask for Mr. Ansted first, lest his sudden coming — the coming of an old friend — might startle Hope; for he remembered Mr. Ulverston said she had not been strong. Would she look pale and thin, like the sick child he had used to carry in his arms, or would she —

His contemplations were broken by the sound of a carriage. It came through the lodge-gates, and dashed past him quickly, but not too quickly for him to discern, bent forward in smiling conversation with some piece of humanity — man or woman, he knew not which — the face which, from that of a mere girl, he had been for these twelve months conjuring into a dream-angel.

It was beaming, smiling — there were about it pink ribbons and laces — it had the air of a woman, and a woman of fashion, and yet it bore the likeness which he could not mistake — it was certainly Hope Ansted! And in a moment it was gone.

He had once more beheld his darling! He stood by the roadside, looking after the carriage with flushing cheek and quick-coming breath. Then, as if a heavy cloud had come over him, he sank his head on his breast, and leaned against the laurel hedge.

Was he disappointed, because she had passed him by unnoticed? It was a mere chance, she being smiling and talking the while. What harm was there in the gay attire? What marvel in the girl's having grown into a woman? And if Hope did ride in a carriage, what possible objection could he urge against her for that?

Mocking himself, somewhat bitterly, for his own con-

summate folly, Ninian changed his first determination, which was to take the next train to London, and quietly entered the lodge-gates.

Mr. Ansted was at home, walking over his little pleasure-ground with a hundred-acre sort of air, following his gardeners about, and giving impossible orders in a lordly voice. The sight of Mr. Græme approaching down the avenue, however, seemed to operate unpleasantly on his feelings. He drew back, and then advanced cautiously, as if the still uncancelled debt rose like a grim monster between him and his coming guest. But there was nothing of the "Pay me what thou owest" aspect in Ninian. He had, indeed, forgotten that the man was his debtor at all. He tried to assume the most cordial aspect he could, to which Mr. Ansted responded with his usual patronising welcome.

"So, my excellent friend, you have found me out in my little country pleasures. Delighted to see you. Have you been long come southwards? And" — with a sudden, distrustful air — "how did you discover my snug hermitage?"

"Mr. Ulverston told me. I thought I might take advantage of the information and visit you."

"Of course — most happy! But the fact is, I have fairly had to run away and hide myself from my friends. Our circle became so enormous — such a life of dissipation, really quite a bore. So we came here for a little rest — to live quietly and retired, myself and my daughter."

"Miss Ansted is well, I trust?"

"Quite well — she has just taken the carriage to drive out our neighbour, Lady Ulverston, to whom Hope is very kind always."

The little, gentle girl showering benevolences on a Lady Ulverston! Times were changing, certainly! Ninian dreaded that when she came in, it would be *Miss Ansted* he would meet, and not his darling child.

He followed Mr. Ansted into the house, which was a perfect *bijou* of a place, full of everything that taste and luxury could design. The master walked through his pleasant abode, pointing out its beauties with great pride.

"Are they all of your collecting — these pictures and articles of *vertu?*" asked Ninian, who had not given Hope's father credit for so much love of art and refinement.

"Mine! Not exactly. I hired this house from some poor devil of an author, who was glad to let it cheap. Money, my dear sir — money can do everything. I think of purchasing it just as it stands. It will take a good sum; but what of that? One must have things nice about one."

Just at this moment Ninian remembered what he had heard the night before, standing on the door-steps of the empty house. He looked round on this abode, and his honest heart recoiled. He pictured Hope smiling in the carriage — could she know or guess all that he guessed? She might not — she might be walking ignorantly in the very midst of this deceitful show, believing her father a rich man — an honourable man — as his former creditor once hoped he had become.

Ninian thought he would stay and judge. So, for two mortal hours he endured Mr. Ansted's conversation, and listened to his boasts, until that personage was summoned away to consult with the worthy upper-labourer he pompously entitled "my steward."

Mr. Græme walked into the little conservatory, which he knew would contain many tokens of Hope's presence, she was so fond of flowers. Her favourites were there — camellias, hyacinths, and, as if to show that she kept her childish loves still, there was lying on one of the fantastic rural seats an open book on gardening, with a bunch of sweet violets left upon its leaves. It made him think of her — not as Mr. Ansted's daughter — but as the little Hope, all of whose feelings were as fresh, and true, and pure, as if she had been born an honest man's child.

He sat down, laid the book on his knee, and played with the March-violets; until he heard some one open the further door of the conservatory. There was a footstep, slow and tired — a pause — a heavy sigh; and he saw through the leaves the same pink bonnet and lace veil. But there was not the same face under it; there was a face looking weary and sad, — that heaviest sadness which follows forced smiles! Hope had returned, and, all unwitting who was there, had come to sit among her flowers, to find there a little solitude — a little peace.

She passed slowly down the walk, sometimes stopping to look at her favourite plants, with a distrait, troubled air, passed quite along to the end, when half hid behind the orange-trees, she saw Ninian Græme.

Hope started, and, as was usual to her in all moments of agitation or surprise, her colour rose in a crimson flood. Then with a cry of delight she flew to her adopted brother; and was just going to throw herself on his neck — as a sister should — when some inexplicable reserve made her pause. But she took and

clasped his hands; hanging upon them with undisguised affection and joy.

"Are you glad to see me, Hope," murmured the voice, hoarse and low, in which Ninian strove to hide his weakness and resume his manhood.

"Oh, so glad, so glad! How I longed to ask you to come — you and Tinie! Over and over again I have planned it, but —"

"I know — I understand — of course it was impossible," said he rightly interpreting her faltering looks. "But I thought, happening to be in London, I might come. And your father has kindly asked me to stay over Sunday."

"He has seen you, then?" said Hope, with a look of great relief; "and you will stay! How happy that will be!" And once more she pressed his hands with unfeigned joy.

His spirit was moved within him. "You are not changed to me, Hope? You are the same little girl you always were?" said he, with a quivering lip.

"Always; why should you doubt it?"

"And you are happy? Let me look in your face and see if you are really happy?" Ninian continued, drawing her towards him.

But something made her start from her soft, bending attitude, and become rigid in womanly dignity. It was nothing of his causing — it was the sound of a heavy step and loud voice at the door. Hearing it, her few soft tears dried up; her face resumed its calm. She was turning into the Miss Ansted whom Ninian had pictured.

"So, Miss A., how soon you have come home: and what did Lady Ulverston think of the new brougham?"

"I never asked, papa."

"It is the most elegant carriage in the county," continued Mr. Ansted; "I assure you, Mr. Græme, it will cost me ninety guineas — not a shilling less."

Hope turned away restlessly.

"And I have ordered from the same maker the prettiest little pony-carriage —"

"I do not want it, papa; I told you so," said Hope quickly; "I had rather much not drive, indeed."

"Pooh, nonsense. We decided all that yesterday," returned the father; and then there ensued an uncomfortable silence. To break it, Ninian asked who was Lady Ulverston? Any relative to the Mr. Ulverston whom they all knew?

"His cousin's wife," Hope answered, playing with her bunch of violets. "Sir Peter is an old man, and very poor, as he succeeded to the bare title, and Mr. Ulverston to the estate; but his cousin — our Mr. Ulverston — is very kind to him."

"And so is my daughter to Lady Ulverston. I often wonder what Hope can see in such a cantankerous old woman, no better than an old maid. But perhaps it is as well, considering all things." And he patted Hope on the shoulder with a smile that made her change to scarlet, and then grow white. She slowly gathered up her bonnet and veil, which she had unfastened, and, with a few words to her father, and a smile to Ninian, quitted the conservatory.

If Mr. Ansted had a merit, it was hospitality — fulsome, perhaps, and partaking of that self-exaltation which was the very core of his nature, but still hospitality. Under his benignant compulsion Ninian made arrangements for a three days' stay.

"You will be very quiet — we have no visitors to-day, except, indeed, one or two of my new neighbours, whom I asked to come and taste my last bin of still Champagne. Capital wine, too! I can't drink anything but still Champagne."

Involuntarily Ninian thought of the empty house at Chester-terrace, and the wronged butchers and bakers hammering at the door.

He did not see Hope again until at dinner-time she made her appearance in the drawing-room, where were lounging three or four gentlemen who looked like steady dinner-eaters and wine-drinkers. Hope saluted them gravely, as became the mistress of a household receiving her father's guests, and then sat down, a little apart.

Narrowly, with eager gaze, Ninian observed her. She was dressed gracefully and well, but with extreme plainness. Her whole aspect, her demeanour, and among that group of men, where she was the only lady, marked one whom necessity had taught dignity, self-possession, and self-control. She was every inch a woman now. Even her father treated her as such, called her "Miss Ansted" and "my daughter," and looked at her as if she were the reflexion of his own importance. His manner to her was all suavity, except once, when he came up to her as if to speak on some domestic arrangement. Then Ninian, whose old habits made him hear distinctly, whether with or against his will, all that was ever said by or to Hope, distinguished this brief colloquy:

"Why have you no ornaments to-day? You will not wear those I gave you."

"I cannot, papa. I have told you so before."

"You are a little fool! You forget your position as my daughter."

No answer, save a bitter spasm passing across the sweet young face.

"I say you shall wear them. What have you done with them? You have not dared to —"

"No, not that — how could I? You need not be afraid, papa."

He gave her a glance, in which was something of anger, more of fear, — and went away. Hope sighed and leaned over the book of prints she was looking at, never moving or lifting her head until Ninian came to take her down to dinner.

The guests preceded her; she, as mistress of the house, came last — Mr. Ansted was always very precise in trivial points of etiquette.

"It is a long time since this little hand has lain here," said Ninian, in his tender, brotherly way. Hope pressed his arm, and for a moment her heart seemed ready to burst; but she never uttered a word. Very soon he saw her sitting at the head of the table, with a calm serious grace; and he began to guess that the "long time" had concealed things of which she had never spoken in her letters. Nothing but the hard teaching of many an inward care could have so transformed into reserved womanhod the simple, heartless child.

The dinner was long, and the conversation such as usually takes place at a table where the host is a *bon vivant*. Hope bore little part therein. When, a good deal of wine being imbibed in a comparatively short time, the talking became loud and careless — too much so for a girl's ears — Miss Ansted quietly rose and departed, and Ninian was glad to see her retire. But tenderly his fancy followed her; and many a time, during the intervals of after-dinner conversation — which was

of the style which might naturally be expected when the whole party where just a degree short of being gentlemen — he conjured up the little figure sitting alone in the drawing-room; perhaps gazing into the fire with that sad, weary look which he had seen in the morning.

As soon as he could, he left the dining-room. He longed to have a few minutes of quiet talk with Hope. He had a thousand questions to ask; above all he wanted to satisfy a foolish thought which had sprung to his mind the night before, but which the sight of Hope today had for the time put to flight. It was about Mr. Ulverston and his boasted intimacy at the house.

"Is that true?" Ninian had contrived to ask during dinner. "Does he often come here?"

"Yes, papa likes him," was Hope's brief answer; and no more was said. She talked very little to anyone, indeed; nor could Mr. Græme read her countenance as he used to do. The unwonted reserve of her demeanour, evidently adopted from necessity, cast a veil over that once transparent character, which seemed to hide her feelings even from him who loved her and knew her best. But he thought when alone with him, she would surely open her heart, and reveal some of the cares which, he feared, troubled her young life now.

Hope was not alone, though she might have been, so quiet was the drawing-room when Ninian put his hand on the door. Sitting beside her on the sofa, was a precise, timid-looking, old-maidish person, in a slate-coloured dress; opposite, leaning by the fire, his eyes cast down with great softness and tenderness, was a young man, once characterised by Hope as "the handsomest she had ever seen." Probably she would not have denied the statement now. Nor indeed, could anybody. When

he looked serious, there were few finer countenances than Mr. Ulverston's.

At the sound of the door, Hope lifted her head quickly; but seeing who it was, she rose up to meet Ninian with a beaming smile.

"Another surprise for you, Mr. Græme," said she, slightly blushing. "I know you will be delighted to see your old friend here."

"I saw him last night," said Ninian, extending his hand, but still looking with an eager anxiety toward Hope. He felt somewhat disappointed that she was not alone.

"Where did you two meet? You never told me anything," said Hope, half turning to Mr. Ulverston.

"I forgot for the moment — and you know we have been talking of so many other things," said he, with his low winning voice.

Miss Ansted made room beside her for her old friend — her "adopted brother," as she called him, — with a loving, grateful look, — in introducing him to Lady Ulverston.

Ninian wondered why she should thus reveal to a mere stranger the former compact between them. He rather wished she had not done so. But he was soothed by her kind manner; every look of those sweet eyes fell upon him with healing and comfort. He did not even mind the attendant shadow that seemed to haunt Miss Ansted wherever she moved. It was Mr. Ulverston's way with every pretty woman.

And Hope had become not merely pretty; she was beautiful — more beautiful than even Ninian had first thought, when he saw her under the shade which her father's presence seemed continually to throw over her.

She appeared to forget it now — she smiled, talked, and sung, with her lovely, pathetic voice; singing which, though not that of genius or passion — for Hope had not a particle of either one or the other — was yet sweet and heart-touching, because it came from the heart.

"Ah, my dear Miss Ansted!" cried the shy and awkward Lady Ulverston, who seemed to look up with eyes of adoration to everything around her, and especially to her elegant cousin-in-law, by whom she was treated with a sort of careless kindness. "My dear Miss Ansted sings like an angel! Nobody could help loving her, even if she were not an heiress."

Hope drew back and looked pained — "Don't let your cousin talk thus," Ninian heard her say to Mr. Ulverston, who leaned over the piano; "I am no heiress — I never shall be; I have told you so many a time and you will not believe me." Her tone was very earnest, even to agitation; but it was answered in a light, bantering way.

"Who ever believes young ladies' declarations on that subject? As if they could know anything about the matter! But, as I likewise have told you many a time — it is Miss Ansted herself that all honour — all love."

A compliment that a man of graceful speeches like Mr. Ulverston would be certain to make. Perhaps, though, he need not have made it so tenderly; and Hope need not have changed colour while he did so. But Ninian was placed where he could not see her. Soon after, declining to sing any more, she came and sat between himself and Lady Ulverston, with a sweet content upon her downcast face; and her manner to both her friends, old and new, was softer and gentler than ever.

But Mr. Ulverston held aloof; and was so silent that any one might have said he was buried in thought, if such a light mind as his could ever be supposed guilty of that enormity, particularly in society.

It was late before the rest of the party left the dining-room, and when they did, their appearance did not much conduce to the pleasure of the evening, they being individuals whose years and country-habits showed them to belong to that period of out-of-date sociality when, in polite parlance, "gentlemen liked to sit long after dinner." No one was positively "*drunk*" — an unpleasant word, which is usually supposed only suitable as applied to the lower classes — but almost everybody was what is considerately termed "*merry*." One, the quietest, dozed in his chair; another persisted in telling comic stories; while Mr. Ansted himself, his shining face, once well-looking enough, glowing with the purple tint which marks the middle age of a free liver, talked with great gusto of every titled acquaintance he had, and overwhelmed poor frightened Lady Ulverston with his laboured civilities.

Hope sat at the piano, turning over the leaves of her music, her face growing gradually paler. No disgust or contempt was there, for her nature was too humble; nor in the passing look she cast towards her father was visible any pang of wounded affection. She came to him when he called, she addressed his guests with perfect courtesy, but all was with the manner of one who, knowing she has a duty to do, does it. She was *Miss Ansted* only.

Once or twice, when she had to talk to these not over-fascinating guests or to reply to her father's fault-finding the girl cast a half-anxious, half appealing glance

o Mr. Ulverston, as if she were accustomed to look to him for aid in a position that must have been annoying to so young a hostess. This time, however, he did not attempt to assist her; but seemed to scan with a certain degree of contempt the company into which he had fallen, — twirled his moustache with dignity, — and took very little notice of anybody.

Before long, he gave his elderly cousin-in-law a hint for their retreat, which the timid woman immediately obeyed.

"We must begone now, if you will excuse us, Mr. Ansted," said she; "Sir Peter is a great invalid, as you know, and likes to have the house all quiet by eleven."

"Hollo, Ulverston, you'll sleep here, won't you? It is much pleasanter than Sir Peter's little cottage — no bigger than a dog-kennel."

"I own a bear's den would be larger, if not so pleasant," returned the young man, with his blandest smile. "Still, excuse me this time, as I must return to town early to-morrow morning. So, adieu for the present!"

He bade Ninian a polite farewell, hoped to see him before he left, and then made his usual elegant disappearance. Certainly, compared with the other guests, he looked a Hyperion among satyrs! Ninian acknowledged this; though, while so thinking, he sighed.

"What — are they gone to the dining-room again?" said Hope, as, after seeing the Ulverstons away, she returned and found Ninian sitting alone.

"Your papa wanted them to smoke, I believe."

"Ah! there they will stay half the night," returned the poor girl, bitterly. But quickly she added — "I

am sorry, because it is not good for papa. I wish Mr. Ulverston had not gone."

"Why?" asked Ninian, with a sudden pang.

"Because papa never — does this when he is here. He can persuade papa to anything, being such a favourite with him."

"And with you, too?"

Hope paused, though it was a hesitation scarce perceptible. Then she said, "I like him because he is very kind to me, and — I need kindness often."

There was a pathetic touch in this speech, which without voluntarily betraying any home-secrets told Ninian all, and moved him to the heart's core.

"My child, you are not quite happy," said he, very tenderly. The tears glittered on her eye-lashes; she looked as if a word more would have unlocked their current; and then, with a sudden thought, she repressed it.

"Dear Mr. Græme — I can't answer you to-night. Perhaps I ought not to tell you anything at all."

There was something to be told, then! And a sudden undefined terror took possession of Ninian's faculties. He remained silent a long time, until the silence grew into a suspense that was almost maddening.

"You look very weary," said Hope, affectionately. "Had you not better go to rest? You know I must take care of my brother."

At the word, a thought struck him.

"If so, may I not ask my little sister a question, which, if she does not answer, she must at least forgive."

She blushed with some inward consciousness, as maidens do; but replied, firmly. "Ask me anything, and I will answer — if it relates to myself only."

"It does! Tell me" — his words were abrupt and few — as few as those torn from the lips of a doomed man — "is my little sister about to marry Mr. — any one I know?"

"No." — The answer was low, and her head was bent.

"Has he ever asked you?"

"Never."

"But perhaps he will?"

"I think — I hope he never may!" said Hope, turning away so that Ninian did not see the trouble in her eyes.

He reproached himself for cruelty in thus wounding her womanly delicacy. Passionately he asked her forgiveness, and then drew back, afraid of betraying the intense joy that her words had imparted. He bade her good-night, tenderly, as in the old times at The Gowans. — Save for one thing; he dared not trust himself to kiss the child's white forehead now.

Nor did she seem to expect it. Yet this reserve pained him not; but only filled him the more with a hope almost too delicious to bear. He felt a happy man that night, — ay, happy as if he had been a youth in the hey-day of his first love-dream, instead of a quiet, serious man, who had run a tilt with the hard world for nearly four-and-thirty years.

CHAPTER II.

It was Sunday morning — sweet, and fresh, and spring-like. Hope sat at the head of the breakfast-table, as she used sometimes to sit at The Gowans, only with a grace less timid and more womanly. Her father did not appear.

"You will have to go to church alone with me," said she. "Papa will not, I believe, go to-day. He hopes you will excuse his not rising to breakfast."

Ninian could very readily. Indeed, long after the morning hours he had heard sounds of revelry which made the fact of his host's being invisible easily accounted for. He received the excuse — his pity yearning over the daughter who "blushed as she gave it in" — though with the blush of a sorrowing not an accusing angel. Neither made any further remark, but talked of the dear old times — of Lindsay, Tinie, and the happy twin-brides. Hope sighed often, while speaking of those simple innocent days.

They went to church; only they two — arm-in-arm together. It chanced to be the first time this had ever happened: since in the large household at The Gowans Mr. Græme and his ward were very seldom left alone. And to every pious heart, in whose depths lies an affection that in sacredness is held next to its religion, it is a solemn thing to enter God's house and there kneel and pray beside the one best beloved of all God's creatures — the one with whom we desire to walk hand-in-hand

through His pleasant earth, and by whose side we hope to stand in His heaven, when there shall be no more need to say "*till death us part.*" Thus, to Ninian at least, it was a sweet and solemn church-going that day.

He had never been to an English church before; but this was a village tabernacle, plain enough to harmonise with the most rigid Presbyterian feeling. It was very narrow and small, containing about a dozen high pews; the rest being mere benches. The communion-table was of homely wood, covered with a worm-eaten red cloth; the communion-seats were plain rush-bottomed chairs, and the altar-railing was of honest, unpainted deal. Yet there the little parish congregation must have knelt for centuries; since in the stone flooring were two monumental brasses, almost obliterated by time. The old Norman arch with its hollowed recess for holy water formed the doorway. The church might have been richer once, but now it was simply a church for the poor. There was not a gentleman's house in the parish except the clergyman's.

"I brought you here," whispered Hope, "because I thought you would like this pretty nook better than our grand new church at Arlington; and you would not dislike the long, quiet walk through fields and lanes."

He dislike it? It had been one dream of pleasantness and peace! There, with the slant pillar of sunbeams reaching up to every window — the old clergyman's voice sounding solemnly within, and larks hymning their matins from without — Ninian said his English prayers beside his beloved English girl.

There is a poem of Longfellow's, which probably Mr. Græme had never heard, for he was not well read in poetry, and was himself no poet, except in the silent

language of his life. But if he had ever seen these verses, "A Gleam of Sunshine," doubtless his manly heart would have thrilled to their truth, for they might have been telling the story of this one Sunday — never to be forgotten:

"This is the highway to the town,
And here the green lane ends,
Through which I walked to church with thee,
O gentlest of my friends!

"Thy dress was like the lilies,
And thy heart as pure as they;
One of God's holy angels
Did walk with me that day.

"Long was the good man's sermon,
But it seemed not long to me,
For he spoke of Ruth the beautiful,
And still I thought of thee.

"Long were the prayers he uttered,
But they seemed not so to me;
For in my heart I prayed with him,
And still I prayed for thee."

Ninian's heart was full. He looked up at the clear sky, beneath which, when service was over, they two walked, she leaning on his arm. But she did not know that he was praying — that his heart, heavy with its deep love, had laid itself down at the feet of God, beseeching for *her*. She did not know, that all the way home, while she went smiling through the sunny fields her young soul seemed lightened of its care, — his was lifting up its passionate voice, — crying on Heaven to keep safe for him his life's sole joy. Very solemn, too, was his prayer — not alone for the girl he loved, now tripping along in her sweet maidenhood, but for his wife, perhaps the mother of his children, his helpmeet in life's coming work, wherein all things done should be done by them both, worthily and for the glory of God. — Until,

that work being over, they might lie side by side in some quiet place like this, with children's reverent tears dropping over them, waiting for the resurrection unto that Kingdom where all earthly marriage will be done away, and that marriage only remain, which, being an union spiritual and complete, is as indissoluble as the union of the soul with God.

Young men and maidens — idle dreamers of baseless dreams, which you call love, and toy with for a year, a month, a week — you know no more of the one true Love, the one sacred Marriage, than does a child who, looking at his own image in two or three wayside ponds, fancies he has seen, and perhaps drained dry, the great ocean which rounds the world!

I have thus recorded Ninian Græme's thoughts, not his words. Of the latter, indeed, there was scarcely anything to tell. When people have been happy, they scarcely know what they have talked about, — if they have talked at all. Probably Hope was the chief speaker, but it was always of things of the past. She only seemed at rest when she could ignore her present life altogether. She did so now — talked of old times, or else of the spring treasures she saw in their country walk — the young wheat, the budding woodbine leaves, the daisies, and the crowsfoot. A very simple maiden she was always, and took great delight in these simple things. When they reached the last hill within sight of Marylands, she turned round and looked back on the pretty meadows, saying, with a heavy sigh,

"Oh, how happy I have been this morning!"

Ninian answered, softly, "And I, too!"

"If it could but be always so," cried Hope, with another sigh. "If I could only escape from this hard,

hard life, and earn my bread, no matter how, or fly away and hide myself at The Gowans."

"Will you come?" said he, suddenly, but in a deep tremulous voice, whose passion he thought any one must have understood. Whether, despite his resolution, he meant Hope to understand, he himself scarcely knew. But he said the words, and waited.

"I come? I wish I could!" she answered, sadly.

She had not comprehended him in the least! His great depth of love was hidden far below the vision of her mild eyes. He must wait a little longer yet before chance smote asunder the smooth waters, and let her see the treasure which lay buried there.

"I mean," said he, with that soft kindness which marked his every action, every word with "the child," — "you might come to us for a little while."

"Oh! that I might! Then I should be quiet and safe — far out of the way of — Ah! sometimes I think I cannot bear up much longer. It is so hard! If I could but have had you near to help me, my brother!"

She sobbed this out, as if her poor heart could restrain itself no longer. And then she hung her head in shame, and accused herself of having grievously erred. "But I have had nobody to speak to — nobody! — and now, seeing you, this came out unawares. And I have told nothing that you may not soon know."

"All that I know now is, that my little Hope is unhappy. What makes her so? Can I do her any good?"

"Oh no — no! I ought not to have said thus much. If my father heard — No, I will not say any more," added she, interrupting herself, and summoning resolution to her brow, and a faint smile to her lips, "I dare say I shall be content before long."

"My child!" said Ninian, firmly, "for you are *my* child as well as your father's daughter — I have on you some little claim."

He thought he had, or would have when she learned all. This made him speak, lest she should wear her heart away in home-troubles, and he not know it. Sooner than that, he would run the chance of startling her calm affection by telling her that his love was not what it seemed, and bidding her take shelter from all her cares on her betrothed husband's breast. For some lingering of that reverence with which the son of a worthy father inclines to regard all fathers, bad or good, made him resolve that he would never steal Mr. Ansted's daughter from him unawares.

These thoughts — clear, but quick as lightning — darted through Ninian's mind, as he spoke of his "claim." He paused a moment upon the word, and then continued,

"I think, dear Hope, you might tell me your trouble. You know I was acquainted with all your father's affairs."

"And are you now?" cried Hope, eagerly.

"No, not now; but I can guess." And then, to soothe the pain he thought her delicacy might feel, he added: "You may be sure that all I guess or learn I shall hold sacred; and Hope might trust me, since she chose me for a brother."

But Hope, even at this, continued silent; though she pressed his hand gratefully. Ninian drew back, his conscience and his pride accusing him for seeking to pry into another man's secrets. He could not have done so, except for the sake of her whose peace was dearer to him than anything in the world, except honour.

Something of this latter feeling rose up and lessoned

him into silence; setting before him the example of Mr. Ansted's daughter, who was a true daughter, even to a Mr. Ansted. He followed her down the garden, for from some unexpressed reason, Hope had dropped his arm on entering the lodge-gates. But whatever she did, and whatever she said, or left unsaid, he felt that he could only reverence her the more.

Mr. Ansted was lounging over his newspapers, or staring with sleepy eyes at the pictures which adorned his drawing-room. And there, listening patiently to his comments on the same, and his attempts to assume the reputation of a man of taste by having "stepped into the shoes" of the late proprietor of this pretty house — sat Ninian Græme, a cheerful martyr, for two long hours. He thought it was hard if he could not bear for half a day what his darling had to bear for a whole life-time. — No, not a whole lifetime, if it pleased God! The gentle little bird should have a peaceful nest yet. He would make all soft and fair for her before he stirred her quiet heart, or embittered her present life the more by the father's opposition, and then he would come and take his sweet dove home.

He knew — something in his heart told him — that she would be content to go. True, she did not love as he did, perhaps never might, — he could hardly expect it, with his plain looks, and thick-coming grey hairs. But he thought that any woman so pure and true must feel her heart respond to such a passionate and entire devotion as his own. Yes! she would not be unhappy with him, even though she was so young and beautiful, and he — Well, he was whatever God had made him! He forgot the time when he had been half fearful lest she should suffer by vainly loving him —

so inconsistent are all men, or, at least, all lovers. But now that he felt his joy and hope grow nearer, and his self-conflict closing fast, there came upon him all those doubts and bitter humilities which ever follow and torture true love — the truer the love, the greater being the suffering.

Ninian's *tête-à-tête* with Mr. Ansted being ended, there came dinner, the fortunate interval which killed at least two hours of a dreary Sunday afternoon. So it seemed in this household, where during all the long Sabbath day the servants toiled and grumbled, and the master yawned. He brightened up however at feeding-time, and gave his whole soul to what unto him seemed the chief aim and purpose of existence — dining. To do him justice, he was not unsocial. His heart warmed as his mouth filled, and he seemed quite unsatisfied unless his guest and his daughter ate and drank in proportionate companionship. But Ninian had all his life been thoroughly disregardful of table luxuries; and Miss Ansted sat, her plate loaded with expensive dainties, her glass filled with the most costly wines, — though at times, when her father dilated upon the immense sum these Lucullian delights had cost him, — she looked as if every mouthful she tasted was like poison. A factory child sitting by the road-side, munching her honest, hard-earned crust, would have had a happier feast.

But yet she sat at the laden board, did her duties as hostess, and perhaps no eye save that which watched her with such close tenderness, might have seen that she had any thought beyond. Only when the bells began to ring for evening service, she rose up as if eager for the relief.

"You are not going to church to-night, Miss A.? Pray give up your religious duties for once, and amuse us," said the father, yawning over his wine. "Or at all events, amuse your old friend Mr. Græme, for I declare I am so confoundedly tired and sleepy."

"Will you lie down and rest, papa, or shall I make you some tea?"

"Tea — nonsense! I know the best cure — a hair of the dog that bit me last night — eh? Take away these detestable wines, Hope, and give me some brandy-and-water. Then I think I'll try to doze, and you can take Mr. Græme into the drawing-room and sing psalms for him (she has a splendid piano, cost 100 guineas, I vow). Only mind and shut the door."

So while Mr. Ansted slumbered off his *gourmandise*, Ninian and Hope sat together in the drawing-room, which breathed another atmosphere than that out of which they passed. It was a sweet room, thickly hung with pictures, strewed with all sorts of fantastic, tasteful ornaments. A few hyacinths in glasses created an abiding perfume, faint but delicious; other scents came wafted in at times through the half-opened door of the conservatory which led out of the apartment. The fire sparkled out from a hearth made gay by painted china tiles, and glimmered with a softened light on two exquisite heads, "Night" and "Morning," which formed the supporters of the white marble chimney-piece.

All these things Ninian's eye noted with a curious tenacity that fixed on his memory that room and all its appertainings. In after years he could at any moment have conjured it up, just as it looked then, in the dim firelight, especially these pale marble heads, against one of which, "Night," Hope was leaning. They seemed

very like — the statue face and the human — both so rarely delicate and fair, with the shut eyelids and the weary look about the mouth, as if sleep were welcome.

"Are you tired, Hope? You surely are not strong. Yet you looked so well yesterday that I quite forgot what I heard of your having been ill, on account of which your father came to live here."

"He said so — did he?"

"Yes. Were you very ill, my child? Was that the reason you did not write for so many weeks? Had I known, I — we — should all have been unhappy."

"You need not," said Hope. She paused — and meeting his anxious gaze, cast down her eyes in shame. "Don't look at me. I cannot keep up a deceit before *you*. What was said was not true; — I have never been ill at all. But it was a good reason for leaving — and we were obliged to leave."

Her look — so sad, so humbled — seemed to indicate, "Don't ask me any more!" Ninian did not ask.

He tried to talk to her of other things; it was very painful for him to see her sitting there, with her sad face, which at every kind word of his appeared to grow sadder, — and to know that he must not say to her as of old, "My child, what ails you?" He would fain do her good, and cheer her without her knowing it; so, in his old merry way, he bade her not sit drooping there, but come and show him the wonders of her conservatory.

Hope obeyed, with something of the ready smile with which she obeyed him of old. Mr. Græme attempted a long botanical conversation — varied by references to his own pet garden at home — and then stood at Hope's side, pointing out, as he was wont to point out to her

all pretty objects of nature when she was his pupil — how graceful the trees of the pleasure-ground looked, stretching up their bare branches against the bright line of the horizon, almost like a summer sunset.

"Do you stay here all summer? It must be a sweet place then?" said Ninian, as seeing her shiver he turned back into the warm drawing-room. "Indeed, it is a sweet place now. I don't think I ever saw a more beautiful room than this."

"It seems to me frightful! Oh, I wish it were the bare walls — the bare floor. I wish we lived in any hovel, however poor, so that we lived there honestly!" And she burst into tears. — They were not child's tears now; Ninian could not comfort them as he had used to do. He saw them flow — large, silent tokens of a woman's heavy grief and humiliation.

He made her sit down and took her hand. "Now, Hope, after this, you must tell me all."

"Must I? — do you say so? Do you think it would be right? Sometimes I have thought it would, because you were my father's friend — that is, you knew my father. Perhaps you could give me advice, or, at least, inform me of something. I am all in the dark. He will not tell me, though I have begged him to do so, almost on my knees."

Hope said this hurriedly, as if frightened at her own revelations. And then, from a sort of feeling that now she had begun she must go on, she looked at Ninian with an eager entreaty. "Tell me, for I am so miserable — do you know anything of my father's affairs? Is he a rich man, or is he not?"

And when Ninian answered in the only way he could, as to his utter ignorance in the matter, it was

piteous to see how dejectedly she sank back, and appealed to him no more.

Mr. Græme did not know whether to speak on or be silent. But Hope, throwing herself on the footstool by his side, looked up with her trusting, child-like look, and cried, "I feel so unhappy — so guilty. Help me — do help me, my brother." Then he knew his course was plain. He must save the child, without any scruples of delicacy with regard to the father.

He took the little hands — the hands that it was his life's prayer to clasp thus fast for ever — and said, "I *will* help you, Hope. I think I understand what you mean to imply. But how was it that you never hinted anything of these —" he hesitated for a word, "these troubles of your father's?"

"I did not know them myself. We first lived as we do now, or more expensively if possible. He told me to spare nothing in the house, he made me wear rich dresses, and gave me, oh! such jewellery! I took it, and was pleased — but now the very sight of it makes me blush for shame."

"My dear Hope! it is no shame to you."

"It is — it is! Think of living in a fine house, and having rich dinners every day, and going about in a carriage, knowing that we have no right to these things, because they are not paid for, and perhaps never may be."

Very low she spoke, and bitter was the shame that dyed her young face crimson.

"I think," she went on, "that I should have never let you know this, except that you have influence with my father; you might help him by your advice. If he feels as I do, he must be very miserable too."

"Did he ever say so? Did he ever tell you of his circumstances in any way? Have you any knowledge of where his income comes from — and how much it is? Forgive me — but if I am to do you any good, I must speak, and you must answer, in this business-like way."

Hope thought a little, and then said, "I know absolutely nothing. Except" — and she blushed, possibly at the supposed falsehood — "except that he told Mr. Ulverston he had estates in America that were increasing every year, and that I should be the richest girl in England before long. And Mr. Ulverston and all my friends consider me so, while I know quite well that it cannot be — that my father is mistaken, or perhaps, fancies the thing he wishes, as people do sometimes. And then all the while I am deceiving everybody. Oh, if only *he* would but believe the truth!"

"You mean your father?" said Ninian. In his anxiety he did not notice that the girl slightly drew back, without answering. "Your father ought to believe how little you care for being an heiress. Still," — and a sudden light broke upon Mr. Græme's mind — "perhaps he expects that with this reputation of wealth his daughter will marry."

"His daughter will not, though." And for the first time Ninian saw a faint tincture of pride in that meek brow. "Nothing shall make me deceive any man thus. Fancy, only fancy for any one to suppose his wife a rich heiress, and then find her out to be — what I am!"

Ninian looked at her, her face of truth, her mien sorrowful, yet so sweet. He thought there was never

a man living who would not rejoice to wed — what she was.

"Sometimes," added Hope, lifting her face and then lowering again — "sometimes, I own — if I must tell all my foolish thoughts to my brother — I have fancied it would be better for me to marry, to go into some new home, rather than live on this wretched, deceitful life."

"You must not do that, Hope," said Ninian, hurriedly. "Give me your promise that you will not!"

"Very well," said Hope, and faintly smiled. "Perhaps, after all, I may never be tried. I often pray for that ending. Better anything than deceit. You yourself would teach me the same." And she raised her eyes, so trustful, pure, and unconscious, that Ninian could not do what more than once he was about to do — open his arms and say, "My love — my wife — come home to me!"

There was a silence; the light from the windows darkened; the fire sunk lower, making the white marble faces seem spectral and strange. Once more poor little Hope looked up at her adopted brother, and said, "Help me!"

Ninian roused himself to think clear thoughts, and to try and act like a world-wise man for his darling's good. He asked many questions that he fancied might lead him to a right knowledge of the truth, but her answers were as simple as a child's.

"You see, I knew nothing of money-matters," said she, helplessly. "I tried to learn, and to be papa's housekeeper, as I am now. At first he gave me money every week, and I did very well, and paid everybody. And then he said I must send the bills to him, and he would pay them. But papa is not very particular, and

thinks tradesmen ought to wait. At last he grew angry whenever I asked him for money; and all these people used to be coming to me, and I could give them nothing but promises and kind words. They were very rude to me sometimes, but I was only sorry; it was so hard for them. Once I went and sold some of my ornaments to pay my dressmaker, because she was too poor to wait until papa's money came in. It must come in very slowly, otherwise, I think — I hope — he would pay everybody. Perhaps I am very wrong in telling these things, but, oh! I have so suffered!"

"My poor child! And when was all this? — at Chester-terrace?"

"Yes! How dreadful the place grew, and the neighbourhood! I used to think as I walked along the streets that the people were staring and pointing at me, as being somebody who owed money and did not pay. I durst not pass the tradespeople's doors; I felt ashamed that anybody should see me. And then to come home and seem rich — to go out and spend money, knowing how much we owed. Oh! what a dreadful life it was!"

"And all the while my poor Hope wrote her cheerful letters, and I never knew a word of this!"

"You never would, nor anybody, but that I am so unhappy, and feel as I were so dishonest. I thought we were coming to live in the country quietly, that papa might save money and pay all his debts. And you see — you see!"

Her eyes glanced round the rich drawing-room as if it were disgusting to her sight. Then she covered her face, in such humiliation as those only suffer who, pure and honourable themselves, have to lead the hollow life

this poor girl led — upright daughter of one who was — there was no gainsaying it — a dishonest man.

Ninian was very near uttering the epithet, when something in Hope's manner stopped him. He only said with a little sternness, for his conscientious nature was sorely tried,

"I guessed that this would happen. I knew your father years ago."

Hope answered, humbly, "Don't think anything hard of him — at least, not very hard. He does not mean to act wrongly. Perhaps he would pay if he could. He may be very poor. Oh, if he would only tell me so, and let us go and live in a little cottage, and pay for everything we had, or not have it at all, I think I should be happy then. Hark! was that my father coming?"

"No; only a step outside the house. The servants coming in from church, perhaps. Don't look so frightened, my poor child."

"Did I look frightened? Everything startles me now. Do you know, the week before we left Chester-terrace we had to keep the doors bolted, and papa never dared to stir out, lest — Oh, I can't tell it, I feel so ashamed!"

From her words, Ninian began to see on what a precipice his darling stood. He took his resolution immediately. There could be no consideration for any one but her.

"Hope," he said, after some moments of thought, "I fancy I have some influence over your father. I will speak to him, and learn from him the true state of his affairs, which seem to be in a very critical position."

"And you will be kind to him, and help him all you can?"

"I will, for your sake. Cheer up, my child, my pet," said he, taking in his hand one of the brown curls he used to like playing with. But he soon let it go; either his own feelings or Hope's drew a veil between them, so as to prevent the little fondnesses that were their wont of old.

Still, he said to himself that this was only for a while. He might yet longer have stood aloof from Miss Ansted the heiress, but he felt that the ruined bankrupt's daughter might soon be taken to his heart and home. Even Lindsay would have advised so. He would wait until he returned to Edinburgh, and could tell that true elder sister all, as was indeed her right to hear. It was the last fraternal sacrifice he had need to make. Then he would come back, bringing Lindsay's own welcome to the wife her brother had chosen.

Thinking thus, he was not pained even when Hope slowly rose from her lowly and loving position at his feet. Ere her father came in, she was again Miss Ansted, silent and distant, though always kind.

CHAPTER III.

— STILL the same Sunday night! How long, or rather how full of successive feelings which seem to lengthen time, had that Sunday been to Ninian Græme!

Hope was gone to bed; at least she had retired, leaving her father and her friend to talk together; but from the anxious look which Ninian caught as she passed out of the room, he knew there would be no sleep for those poor weary eyes. He remembered how more than once, when she was recovering from the fever, he had chanced to come into the study and find her sleeping. What a calm, sweet look she had! If he could but take her and shelter her from care, and bring back that restful, happy look once more! And all the man was stirred within him in a mingling of passion and tenderness, so that he saw nothing but the image of his dreams, and took no notice of the coarse, burly likeness before him — an elderly Bacchus, puffing away in the *dolce far niente* of a Sunday night.

"D—d bad cigars," said Mr. Ansted, who, it should be remarked, was never quite so gentlemanly after dinner as before. He put his manners on like his coats, and cast them off in like fashion, — when they were too tight a fit and cramped his natural peculiarities. "The most confounded trash I ever smoked; and yet I pay a pretty price for them too."

"So you seem to do for everything you have about you. You have a good share of the elegances of life."

"Of course! I like enjoyment. I pay my money and I get its worth. There is no harm in that, I suppose?"

"Certainly not. A man who pays his way in the world has a right to the best the world can give him."

Ninian, who, absorbed in other thoughts, had not quite considered what he was saying, nor meant to point his words so sarcastically — saw how his host winced under their application.

He was in a most uncomfortable position. To eat a man's dinners, and then take him to task for something very like dishonesty, was a thing extremely abhorrent to Mr. Græme. Yet he had a true and not unfriendly purpose to fulfil towards his former debtor; and if what he had to say was not said that night, the chance might not occur again.

In various delicate ways, he tried to turn the conversation to the old relations between them, as client and legal adviser. He thought Mr. Ansted might become more confidential then. But it is a bad thing to be too well acquainted with some men's past; and though, conscious of the hold that Ninian had over him, Hope's father was perfectly bland and civil, yet it was evident that the subject was a disagreeable one.

"Come — we'll not bother our heads with business now, Græme. You used to press me deucedly hard, sometimes; you're a far pleasanter fellow to meet in one's own house over a bottle of wine, than in that musty old office of yours. Here's to your health, and may you get on in the world, and have as pretty a place of your own as this Marylands of mine. For, by Jove! I like it so much, I intend to buy it. Wouldn't you advise me, eh?"

"I cannot advise, being now thoroughly ignorant of your circumstances and property. Still, be prudent.

You know you were never a very prudent fellow, when I had the management of your matters, but you seem to be flourishing now, to all appearances."

"Appearances! You don't mean to say that it's not so? Bah! I could almost fancy that you came to look after your own little matters. I vow, the paltry sum had slipped my memory. But you shall have it in — let me see — a bill of three months? How much is it, interest and all?" With a contemptuous air, he leaned back, puffed away, and tried to assume the careless dignity of a man of property.

Ninian's pride rose. "Look you, Mr. Ansted; I never should have mentioned this subject if you had not. The sum you owe me you can pay when you choose — I shall never ask you. But, though I am no longer your business-agent, and have nothing to do with your present affairs, I cannot help feeling an interest in them."

"Very much obliged. Then you will be delighted to know that all is prospering with me. My daughter, when she marries (and a certain young fellow of my acquaintance, of good family and estate, would be glad if that were to be to-morrow) — my daughter will have 50,000*l.* down, or property equivalent. A splendid alliance; and you shall draw up the settlements, eh, Græme?"

Ninian's fears, ever alive, made him blench a little. "This is news! Does Miss Ansted know it, or consent to it?"

"Pooh! Of course she'll consent. It is the best offer she has had, to my knowledge, and she has refused some very good ones. A very taking girl is Hope; just what I could have expected my daughter to be. And she'll have a pretty penny of her own some of these days; one

or two of my American plantations — besides this little place of Marylands. What do you think of it, Græme? I shall lay out a thousand or two upon it, and then, 'pon my life! it will be the prettiest residence in the county."

He said all this with such a frank, plausible air, that Ninian began to doubt whether he himself had not been labouring under a delusion. Never was there a man who had so completely the gift of making black appear white, or who by his supreme assurance was better fitted to sustain the difficult part of an adventurer.

"Have you bought the house?" asked Mr. Græme, half believing in his own question.

"Not yet; but I shall do, knick-knackeries and all. The poor devil who collected them — he was an author, or an artist, or some such shabby profession — will be glad enough to sell everything, Ulverston says. He took Marylands for me, and I came at once, though my former lease was not quite out. But money's no object, compared to comfort."

"You removed suddenly, I believe. I was inquiring for you on Friday at Chester-terrace."

Mr. Ansted gave him a searching glance. "You — you heard nothing there? The truth is," added he, receiving no immediate answer, "I was obliged to leave no address. Some trifling annoyances, you understand? — such as a gentleman is always subject to when his property is much tied up. But nothing of any consequence — easily remedied by a little loose cash. I shall settle the matters in a week or so. You couldn't" — and here Mr. Ansted seemed struck by a sudden idea — "you couldn't oblige me with a hundred or two, just for a few days, to get these things over?"

"Mr. Ansted," said Ninian, firmly, though not unkindly, and conquering the repulsion that would arise, "if I had that sum to lend, which I have not, I should be slow to employ it thus. It seems to me that it would be like pouring in a bucketful of sand to stop up a river."

"What do you mean to insinuate?" cried the other, rising up, irate. But he met the quiet look which had controlled him many a time. Somehow, from old experience, he felt it would not do to get into a passion with Ninian Græme. He knocked out the ashes of his cigar, and sat down again.

"I mean to insinuate nothing; but I think, now we are upon this topic, it is but honest to tell you what I heard that night, and what, drawing my own conclusions since, I see good reasons for believing — that you are in very considerable embarrassments."

"You are a —" The epithet, noun and adjective included, were not altogether as graceful and gentlemanlike as they might have been. They made Ninian's Scottish blood rise up in fire, but it was cooled by one thought — the only thought that could have made him act and speak as he now did, though the task was so repugnant to his feelings that more than once he doubted whether he was justified therein. Again he seemed to hear the entreating voice — "Ah! do help me! do talk with my father!"

"I am sorry to have annoyed you, Mr. Ansted, nor shall I urge in apology any claims I might have upon your confidence."

"Confidence! You insulted me, sir."

"I trust not, when I am now sitting under your own roof, where I have been a guest these two days. It is

very unpleasant to me to mention these things at all; but having been your legal adviser, and wishing still to be your friend, I cannot help warning you that these reports are afloat. If they be at all true, and the same thing happens again that happened some years ago, your position would turn out very difficult and hard to be retrieved."

Mr. Ansted looked alarmed. He was not the bravest man in the world, and knew that Ninian Græme had some power over him, which might be wielded to his hurt. It was not safe to make such an enemy. His pompous manner lowered into something very like cajoling.

"Come, now, you're an old friend, and I'll not deceive you, such a lynx-eyed fellow as you seem. Things have gone rather hard with me of late; but I shall retrieve them all if I can only keep up my credit until I get under the wing of my son-in-law elect, young Ulverston."

"It was he, then, whom you alluded to?"

"To be sure. An excellent match for Hope, and a great advantage to me. Also, don't you see that he's mad after the girl — quite mad. I expect every day he will offer himself — and then, by Heaven! whether she likes it or not, I'll have them married at once, and make all safe."

The brandy-and-water must certainly have unloosed Mr. Ansted's tongue a little, or he could not have been thus communicative. In a moment Ninian discerned the whole farrago of lies — the 50,000*l.* — the grand settlement — the gilded cheat by which Hope was to be lifted out of her own sphere by a husband whom her father thought aristocratic. If, in that manly heart there

had been nothing tenderer than pity, it would have throbbed in behalf of the innocent girl. But with that intense love stirring its depths, it was thrilled with a passion too strong for control.

"Now, by the God that made me — I say, Ralph Ansted, before you shall sell your own child in that way, I will do —"

"What?"

"That which will prevent it. I will go and tell Ulverston what I know, — and you are well aware I know it, — how that you are a man overwhelmed by debt, hunted from Scotland to America, from America to England; that at this moment you hardly dare cross your own threshold for fear of the law!"

Mr. Ansted never answered; he was dumb either with fear or rage.

"Now, this is what I have to say to you," continued Ninian, in a voice less stern and very quiet. "Be an honest man, give up all to your creditors, and I will help you as I helped you before. My own claims, I told you, I shall never urge or think of. All I want is to save you and yours from the wretchedness and disgrace that must come upon you, if you go on living your present life. You know, some time or other, the crash must come."

"Let it come!" shouted out the enraged adventurer, with a fierce oath; and then, hurling out many more, he ordered Ninian to quit the house.

This was not the raving of a drunken man, for though slightly excited, he was by no means intoxicated. It was the ebullition of a man roused from the smooth ease of selfishness to ferocity. No person could have

withstood it, except one who was used to control, not only others but himself, as was Ninian Græme.

"I will go at once, if you wish it," said he, as he stood upright, his cheek something whitened with self-restraint, for he had within him all a man's fierce passions and indignant pride. "But I tell you once again, I meant you only kindness; nor shall you force from me one word of anger or disrespect, since you are an older man than I — a father too —"

He remembered *whose* father, and stopped abruptly. Unable to trust himself longer, he walked from the room and towards the hall-door, which he opened with some dim intention of leaving the house immediately, though it was past midnight.

"Mr. Græme — Mr. Græme!" trembled out a terrified voice, and the poor child came creeping down the stairs, dressed just as she had left them. She had evidently made no attempt to go to rest, but had sat all these hours watching.

"Mr. Græme, where are you going? Oh, I hope you have had no quarrel with my father! Come back again! — ah, do!" She was so child-like ever, with her "Ohs!" and "Ahs!" and broken words. And with the action of a frightened child she hung upon Ninian, drawing him back into the house — not towards the room where her father was, but towards the drawing-room. It was almost dark, there being only a few red embers left of the fire. By this glimmer Ninian could scarcely see Hope, but he felt the light grasp of her cold hands, which never once let him go. He felt also that she was trembling all over. She was never made for a heroine, but for one of those timid, clinging women, who, in most cases, are by men loved best.

Ninian put his arm round her, for she could hardly stand. "Do not be afraid, Hope, there is nothing the matter. I spoke to your father, and made him angry; he wishes me to go away; and so I will."

He had had some ado to repress his own impetuous mood, and his spirit vibrated still beneath the smothered storm. People who let their passions rage, and burst, and cease, know little of this fearful inward war, which tears and destroys the body, even though the mind sits calmly — a king on a ruined throne.

"I can't let you go — I dare not. I know something is about to happen. Only stay till morning!"

"Impossible! I wish I had never spoken to your father at all — nor subjected myself to this. I have, at least, some manly feeling — some sense of right. I must leave the house indeed!"

Somehow he could not look at Mr. Ansted's daughter. He felt that all along this love had cost his pride and manhood dear.

"You are angry. You will leave me, and never see me again — me, your poor child, that I thought you cared for," said Hope, as her hands dropped from him.

"I not care for you? Oh, my God, Thou knowest the truth," groaned he, half inaudible. He was about to stretch his arms — snatch at the dim figure that seemed gliding away — draw it close to his heart, that silently in the darkness she might feel, as she must feel, how the love wherewith she thought he loved her, was as nothing compared to the strong pulse of passion that now beat in his bosom.

If this had chanced — if her unconscious heart, tender and grateful ever, had wakened up to such knowledge, who can tell what might have been? "*Might*

have been!" So mourn we often, forgetting that life is one eternal "to be," which we cannot alter. The chance of a moment, the turning of a straw — seem to do or undo all. But only *seem;* since there works underneath the Infinite Will — which we shall one day know to have been as far above our human will as heaven is above earth.

Ninian, extending his arms, that quivered and trembled with their great strength of love, heard a noise and a struggle. Hope heard it too. Crying out, "They're here — I knew it! They're come to take my father" — she fled across the hall, and out of Ninian's sight.

He followed. There stood Mr. Ansted in the grasp of one man, while another was entering by the open hall-door. They were sheriff's officers; the unlucky debtor had been arrested at last.

This unpleasant adventure could not be quite a novelty to Ralph Ansted. He was used to it before. He cursed and swore a little for form's sake, and then yielded, sinking down in his arm-chair and staring blankly at his foes. His daughter rushed and clung to him; at such a time women forget everything save pity and grief.

Ninian, unwilling to meet the fallen countenance of his host, stepped aside and spoke to the men: "This is a sudden proceeding. Where is your warrant?"

"Here, sir; all right — made out for Monday."

"But this is Sunday night; and I thought nobody could be arrested on a Sunday," cried Hope.

"You seem as sharp as your father, miss. And I dare say he's had good practice by this time," said the sheriff's officer, rudely. "Pretty work it has been to nab him. But it's done now — all right you see, sir."

And he pulled out the writ, together with a great silver watch, which pointed to half-past one. It was really a clever arrest; and the bailiffs chuckled grimly at one another, as, according to all novelists, that much-maligned class invariably do.

Yet the men were probably honest men — honester than their victim; for one of them, when Mr. Ansted sulkily shook off his daughter, said civilly, "Don't take on, miss," and would have helped her up from the floor where she knelt, had not Ninian jealously advanced.

"Come away," whispered he, trying to shield his darling from the rude staring of the bailiffs, and of the men and women servants that were now crowding into the room, some frightened, some insolent.

But she would not go, and kept sobbing out, "Papa, papa!" for her strength of mind was weakened by her long hours of solitary watching that night.

"Don't be a fool, girl," was all the father vouchsafed to answer. "Have your wits about you; go up-stairs and look me out some clothes."

At that harsh voice, Hope ceased crying, and became herself, her new self — such as trouble had brought her to be — silent, mechanical, and cold.

Without replying, she took a light and left the room, followed by that grim horror, the man in possession.

Ninian followed likewise. Wherever she went his watchfulness and his cares were never absent from her. At last she grew very quiet and composed — the poor young mistress of the house, which was now become the house of an arrested debtor, full of clamours, anger, and confusion. She tried to pacify the servants and keep them from insulting her father; she went about getting ready what little things she could for the prisoner's

comfort. When at daybreak Mr. Ansted started with his captors, the poor girl went with him to the lodge-gates, and, scarce sheltered from the rain, stood sorrowfully under the tall holly-trees, which looked ghostly in the dawn.

Ninian, who in his quiet way had managed to control everything — making bailiffs civil, and enraged domestics respectful enough to hold their tongues — came and put a shawl over her bare head, that was wet with rain. She turned and hid her face on his shoulder, weeping bitterly.

He could not enfold and comfort her there, for there were other people by who knew he was not her brother. Even when he had drawn her arm through his and taken her back into the house, something compelled him to respect her trouble, by not saying one word more than brotherly affection might use. But he soothed her with inexpressible gentleness, and arranged everything for her in that now miserable house, so as to save her from all further pain.

"You cannot stay here, Hope; it is impossible."

"I must! I have to take care of papa's house and property."

"You don't know then, my poor child, that both are no longer his or yours. The law claims everything."

"I never thought of that. What, will all be lost? — my books, my pretty piano, my plants?" And for a moment she looked sad. "Well! I do not mind; anything is better than to live as we lived. And you will remember your promise, and help my father? I think he said he was sure not to be kept in prison" — she faltered over the shameful word — "for very long. You will manage things for him?" added she, looking up with

a full confidence as if everything was secure that was in the hands of Ninian Græme.

"I will do all I can; but I must first get you out safe away from here. Will you" — here he paused, — "will you, dear Hope, come home with me at once to Lindsay?"

"Not yet," said she; "I cannot — I ought not."

And Ninian, the more he longed, the more he forbore to urge.

"I think," Hope continued, after a long silence, "that I had best go to Lady Ulverston's cottage, close by. She will be kind to me, whatever happens; and I can hide there, and see nobody; but nobody will come near me now." She half sighed; and then added once more, "Still, I do not mind; it must come; I am glad it is over!"

Ninian thought he would rather have left his treasure anywhere than at Lady Ulverston's. But he contemned himself for such a foolish jealousy, and his worldly knowledge taught him there was not much fear of Mr. Ulverston's coming a-wooing to the bankrupt's daughter. Nobody would steal his jewel now.

He rejoiced in her poverty: he gloried in her utter dependence; and when a few hours after he took her away from that hateful dwelling, she carrying nothing from it but the clothes she wore, and her little bundle in her hand, he was content, glad, proud! He felt as if she were already his own. He sat with her in the jolting fly, the Arlington fly, which never went out but the whole village was agog to learn whither, — and the crazy vehicle seemed to him as pleasant as a marriage chariot, bearing away bridegroom and bride. So strangely happy was he, that he had some trouble to

hide it all, and look grave enough to meet Hope's sad face. But he knew if there was any power in human love it would not be thus sad for very long.

Mr. Græme had already written and explained all to Sir Peter Ulverston's worthy wife. They saw her standing at the gate of her garden, ready to welcome Miss Ansted.

"I will leave you together," said Ninian. "The best thing I can do is to go up to town at once."

"Ah! that is kind. You will be sure to see my father? And — one thing more, if it will not trouble you."

"Trouble me! How can you talk so, dear child? What is it?"

She hesitated, and blushed; he thought with shame.

"Our friends must soon know what has happened. If you meet any, tell them. Above all, will you tell Mr. Ulverston? He was to have come down to-morrow, and I had rather not see him, nor anybody."

"You shall not, dear. You shall rest safe for a few days, until I fetch Lindsay, and we both come and take you home."

She smiled, but did not answer a word one way or the other.

The carriage was drawing up to Lady Ulverston's gate. "One minute, Hope — one minute. Look at me! Tell me that you are not unhappy — that you trust in me!"

"Ah, yes! How could I not?"

"You are sure you will be content and safe here, even if I do not see you for three or four days? I want

to bring Lindsay, you know. She will take care of you, perhaps better than I."

"Ah, that could not be!" murmured the grateful, loving voice, as Hope held out both her hands to her faithful friend.

He kissed them, one after the other. He thought she must have felt — perhaps he wished her to feel — that the touch which burned on them was no brother's kiss. But she showed no surprise either in word or sign; a minute after she was looking out of the window, smiling, or trying to smile, at Lady Ulverston.

Ninian lifted her out of the carriage, watched her turn on the door-step to give him one affectionate look more, then leaped back into his place, and drove on to London.

CHAPTER IV.

Mr. Græme's first visit on reaching town, was whither he knew Hope would have wished him first to go — to her father.

The interior of a sponging house is no novelty — it has been painted by most of our modern tale-writers; by many from observation; by some, unlucky souls! from experience. Therefore it will be sufficient to say that the scene was a sponging-house, and nothing more.

There Ninian found the arrested insolvent eating a hearty and expensive breakfast out of a service of wretched delf. It must be a very great degree of affliction that could blunt Mr. Ansted's appetite, and a still greater need that would stand in the way of his indulging it. Nor did he seem much cast down by his position; he gave orders to the slatternly young Jewess who waited with as imperious an air as he did to his footmen at Marylands.

"Come in, Græme; don't hang about the door in that fashion. Bah! did you never before see a gentleman in difficulties?" said he to Ninian; who, remembering what had passed between them the previous night, felt a certain delicacy at making his presence known. He need not have feared. Self-importance is the best proof-armour, and the greatest ass alive would abstain from kicking at the expected lifter-off of his burdens — until they were removed.

So Mr. Ansted was very civil to his visitor.

Ninian was glad of this. It made his way more plain. He was even softened to compassion when he looked round the miserable debtor's lodging, and thought of his darling's father shut up in such a place.

"I am come to talk with you, Mr. Ansted," said he, when, the breakfast-things being despatched, they two were left together, in as much solitude as was possible in such a den — when the noise and oaths of a motley crew of inmates resounded from every room in the house. "I wish to see if I can do anything for you, to put your affairs in order."

"Hang my affairs! Let them take their chance, so as I can only get out of here," grumbled Mr. Ansted. "If that knave who found me out at Marylands is not quieted somehow to-day, he'll be spreading the matter, and I shall have all my other creditors coming down upon me like a swarm of bees. Now, if some worthy fellow would only help me to hush the matter up, and get home to-night. I've a dinner-party to-morrow, by Jove!"

Ninian opened his eyes in astonishment that proved him to be, for a man of the world, exceedingly ignorant as regarded the ways of dishonesty. "Why, I thought even from your own confession, that your affairs were irretrievably confused — that in fact you were over head and ears in debt?"

"So I am; but many a fellow has to keep afloat in that way all his life, and I have only to do it for a little while. Confound it — isn't it hard that a gentleman like me, just about to go into Parliament — Ulverston promised me his interest in one of the Irish counties, but that's a secret yet — should be annoyed by

a parcel of beggarly tradesmen? Why can't they wait my convenience? Of course when my income comes in regularly, I shall pay them all."

"I trust so," said Ninian, briefly. He was not prone to administer moral lectures, nor, had he been so, was this the time, place, or subject, for such a proceeding.

The Jew handmaiden here entered with a box of cigars, which she said the "gen'leman" had ordered, and for which the money must be paid instanter. Mr. Ansted threw down a sovereign.

"The last! There it goes. So, 'pon my life and soul, my worthy old friend, you must set your wits to work and get me out to-night, or the matter will become unpleasant. I can't let my house and furniture go to the devil — or the Sheriffs' Court, and for want of a little ready money."

"I do not understand you," said Ninian Græme; and his cold, clear, searching eye was fixed on the debtor, as at last he forced himself to speak the bare truth without any scruple. "All I know is, that a man, situated as I know you to be, has but one honest course to pursue; he must give up himself and his property, and go through the Insolvent Court. This is what I came to advise with you upon. I don't myself practise in your English law; but I have friends here who, at my request, will assist you in every way. Now, be frank with me, and tell me what are your assets, and who are your creditors? If the thing must be, we had best get over it at once."

"Come, come, my good fellow, it is impossible. You can't mean what you say. Give up my pretty house? I might not meet such another for a dozen years. And think of the disgrace! Bah! the Insolvent Court is very

well for common people — but for a gentleman! After my difficulties in Edinburgh, too, when you Scotch were so cursedly hard with me! The plan is ridiculous, and I'll have nothing to say to it."

"Then, I can neither advise nor further any other," said Ninian, half rising. But he saw Mr. Ansted's quick alarm, and sat down again. While there was a chance left he could not renounce Hope's father. "However, before I go, may I hear what is your intended course in this emergency?" said he, with a conciliatory air.

People out-blown with their own conceit are like air-bladders under water; the moment you take your restraining hand from them, up to the surface they rise. Mr. Ansted was himself again immediately.

"I'll tell you what I shall do," said he, crossing his legs, and playing with the handsome diamond ring which adorned his rather clumsy hand. "To go through the Court is quite impossible. To be sure, I must settle a few of my little annoyances, those fellows are so insatiable. A thousand or two will do it for the present. Now if any good-natured friend would advance the money, just for a few months, on profitable interest — say ten per cent. — eh?"

"If, you mean me," said Ninian, "I have before told you, Mr. Ansted, I will not be a party to any arrangement of that kind."

"Don't inconvenience yourself, pray," said the other importantly. "I know many others who would be only too happy. My friend Ulverston for instance, except that one wouldn't exactly like to explain these matters to a gentleman who is about to become one's son-in-law. I wish he was so now, and then I should not be shut up in this d—d unpleasant hole. They might have been

married by this time, I'll bet, if that simpleton of a girl had not behaved herself, as she does to every one, so confoundedly proud and shy."

Had the man been any one but Hope's father, the chances are that Ninian would have indulged in the impulse, and probably the act, of rising up and knocking him down. But on second thoughts, these words imparted a strange joy. She was then "proud" and "shy" to all other men; she, his darling, who sat at his feet, who wept on his shoulder, who looked up to him with loving eyes! Perhaps, after all, it would not be so difficult and new a lesson to teach her, when he said, "My wife, love me!"

For a moment he suffered himself to pause and dream, until even this foul place grew fair, or was for the time forgotten. When he drew his hand from before his eyes, much of his stern business look was gone.

"Come, Græme, you'll act a friend's part," said Mr. Ansted, stooping to polite condescension; "no one ever loses anything by serving *me*, I assure you. Supposing you have not the money yourself — you Edinburgh writers are poor as rats, I know — still, you might have a client or two, who wished to employ their money advantageously."

"No," said Ninian, firmly. "It would go against my judgment, first; and, in the second place, would only lead you deeper into debt. Take my advice — it is not for the first time, you know — meet your difficulties like a brave man. Pay your creditors out of what estate you have, get free, and start anew. You will have no family cares; your sons are dead, and your daughter —" He hesitated, and a faint impulse moved him, but was quelled. He could not first utter the long-cherished

secret of his love in such a place, and to such ears. "Your daughter, I can engage, will be taken charge of by my sister Lindsay, for any length of time you choose."

"Very much obliged!" answered Mr. Ansted, with a slight sneer; "but that does not suit my purpose. My daughter, as I told you, will marry into a high family very soon. If you and Miss Græme are so greatly interested in her welfare, the best thing you can do to advance it, is what I told you. Only assist me in procuring the money to stop these fools' mouths, and, by Heaven! I'll have the wedding in a month."

Ninian rose. "I see it is in vain our talking longer, for I cannot serve you in any way; at least, in the way you desire. I shall only irritate you," said he, noticing the coarse face growing purple with anger. "I had better go."

"And leave me to spend the night in this horrible den. I'll tell you what, Ninian Græme —" and Mr. Ansted's loud voice burst into a volley of language, impossible to repeat, but which showed the real nature hid within him. It was hard for a man to listen to such, especially from the father of his chosen wife. It might even have made less unselfish love recoil from that tie; many a proud, upright heart has done so. But Ninian never wavered.

He stood and endured these ravings, for Mr. Ansted did indeed rave, when, his pomposity being swept away, the true sense of his position dawned upon his mind — a mind feeble at the core, as all such generally are. Then Ninian had to meet another trial of firmness — the boaster's abject entreaties. Mr. Ansted now began to see there was but one friend in the world who was

able, and from some reason or other — probably he ascribed it to a sense of his own individual merits — was also willing, to help him.

"You ought not to be so hard upon me, Græme. I'm getting an old man, and my sons are dead. My health is not so good as it used to be; hang it! Unless I get all the comforts of life, I shall be in my grave in no time. And then what's to become of my daughter?"

Ninian made no reply.

"Well, if you will not advance me money in a straightforward way, I must just get it how I can. I'll go to the Jews. There's lots of them about this place always. I'll inquire."

He fumbled about for the ragged bell-pull, but Ninian seized his hand.

"Stay! I can't let you go to destruction in that way. God knows, Mr. Ansted, I would do anything in the world to see you what I wish," said he, earnestly. And bitterly he thought, that he would have given up half his prospects in life, only to know his Hope's father an honest man.

Mr. Ansted stopped and looked curiously at the somewhat agitated countenance of Ninian Græme. "You're very kind, but words are cheap, we know."

"I'll tell you what I will do," said the other, not replying to this coarse speech. "I have no property, as you know. I live from hand to mouth, according as I can. With my large family a year's income hardly lasts the year. But I have been fortunate lately. I have put by a hundred or two — for a purpose I had. If you will renounce the false position you now hold, give up all you have, and make arrangements with your creditors for the future, I will lend you this sum; with

which you can start for America, and begin the world again for the third time."

Ninian paused. He knew the sanguine temperament of the man with whom he had to deal — a man ready to catch at any new scheme. He caught at this proposal with avidity.

"Not a bad thought that of yours. You might employ your money worse, too, my dear fellow. I've a great mind to close with your offer, since you are so pressing. But the sum is very small. Say three hundred, now?"

Ninian turned away. He was giving up in that money a thousand dreams, a thousand joys dear to his manly heart — the new home to which he had resolved to bring his wife, leaving Lindsay mistress of The Gowans — the sweet providings that were to supply that home; the dependence for the present; the hope as to the future. Nay, this sum being renounced, he was not sure whether he would as yet be able to marry at all; in which case, to avoid any fear or restraint in his household, he might have still to keep his secret, and maintain towards Hope the old brotherly relation, which every day cost him more and more of self-control and suffering.

"Still," he mused, "when she comes to know all, and how, if I did this, it was for her father, I think, I think —" And his thought dissolved in a dreamy vision of what her look would be when, one by one, these things were revealed to her. He seemed to see her eyes lifted, clear with joy, and bright with tears. He almost felt the clinging of her arms round his neck, when, the fulness and infinite sacrifice of his love being known, she would murmur, as she had often done before, but with oh! how different meaning! — "Oh! there never was anybody like you!"

"So you'll not help me with another hundred? Not even if I increase the rate of interest? which will matter little, for I shall easily double and treble my capital in the New World. I shall work my estates — I have them, I assure you, somewhere on the Blue Mountains, only they want clearing. They'll be valuable in another five years. I'll make my fortune, and yours, too, Græme."

"I hope so — the former at least," Ninian answered gravely. And perhaps, anxious as he was to view Mr. Ansted's character in the least unfavourable light, his aversion became tempered with a sort of pity for a man who might be less wilfully unprincipled than led away by every vague chimera of fortune, and afterwards blinded by selfish appetites which made him sacrifice to a love of luxury every sense of uprightness and honesty.

Still, he was getting an elderly man — and old age, void of honour, is, if unworthy of respect, at least most worthy of pity. Possibly, even if Mr. Ansted had not been Hope's father, the good Ninian would have felt glad thus to give him a chance of retrieval. Having at last made the debtor place everything in his hands, and having spent many hours in arranging business for him, Ninian left him safe in a decent lodging; for Mr. Ansted refused to go near his daughter.

"I'll give her one more chance of hooking her lover, which perhaps might be the better for her father too," said he, with a laugh that grated horribly on Mr. Græme's ears. "Ulverston was to have dined at Marylands to-morrow. I fancy he meant to come to the scratch then. Perhaps he'll go down now, and find Hope at Lady Ulverston's. If the girl only has the sense to smooth matters, she might be married still. Eh, don't you think so? What do you say?"

"Nothing!" answered Ninian, and changed the conversation.

But he vowed to himself that he would obey Hope's request — eagerly he remembered it had been her request — that this same night Mr. Ulverston should be made acquainted with what had occurred at Marylands.

It seemed fated that he should always visit that gentleman's chambers at inopportune hours. This time it was late in the evening, and Mr. Ulverston had gone out to dinner. He would be at home soon, however, his valet said, "as," he added, with something very like a grin, "his master had a very particular appointment that evening. Would the gentleman wait an hour?"

Mr. Græme had very rarely an hour to throw away in his busy life. So he went back to his hotel, and there, sitting in the humble coffee-room (he knew he must be doubly economical now), with the buzz of many men around him, he wrote a long, brotherly letter to his darling, telling her all that he had done, except the transaction between himself and Mr. Ansted. His epistle was full of comfort, counsel, and cheer. Some trouble it cost him, for even its loving hypocrisy was a pain to his honest nature. Perhaps, despite his care, any eye quick to read humanity might have discerned in every line a smothered, yearning tenderness, more touching than the most passionate love-letter that ever was penned.

He finished at last, and with the letter in his pocket went once more to Mr. Ulverston's.

Still, the young man had not returned. Ninian spent a full half-hour in that richly-furnished bachelor's parlour, where this fortunate possessor of the world's goods disposed of some portion of his valuable existence. Every-

where lay tokens of the gay, free and easy life the rich man led — books, statuettes, and objects of *vertu* being scattered about in that unneat fashion which marks the absence of a woman's hand in a home.

There were other signs of a bachelor's apartment — fencing foils in a corner, a queer heap which looked like a masquerade costume lying on the sofa, and on the floor a half-soiled pack of cards. An exquisite little desk was open on the table, and about it were strewn heaps of letters, many of them evidently from women, there being two or three different female hands. Ninian felt a sort of shudder lest he might see among them one he knew. But it was not so; and he was half indignant with himself for having involuntarily glanced towards Mr. Ulverston's property and correspondence. He took up a book, and would not look about him any more. In this abode of a man who had never struggled, at whose feet lay every worldly pleasure, who might go where he chose, do kind actions when he chose — above all, marry when he chose — was a something which contrasted too strongly with Ninian's own position to make him feel quite at rest.

He dropped the book and sat with his head on his two hands, thinking.

Mr. Ulverston at last appeared, bursting in with an impetuosity that proved him not unworthy of Tinie's christening as "The Flash of Lightning."

"The devil! No lights — no supper ready — and Mademoiselle and the rest will be here the minute the play is over. Is that you, Dufour, you lazy fool?"

Had a ghost risen out of the arm-chair instead of honest Ninian Græme, Mr. Ulverston could not have

looked more thoroughly aghast. But he never lost his presence of mind or his good manners long.

"Confound it, my dear fellow, is it you that I have been abusing? I beg your pardon, heartily. But who could have recognised you by this light? How stupid my servant is to let the lamp go out."

"It was my doing, I think; and I ought to apologise for thus intruding, but —"

"You are quite welcome! To be sure, I have a party of acquaintance to supper — not exactly of your sort, I fear, sensible Scotchman as you are, and 'unco gude,' as they say in the North — still, will you stay?"

Notwithstanding the polite warmth of his invitation, Mr. Ulverston looked uncomfortable, as if he already heard the rustling of "Mademoiselle's" silk skirts on the staircase.

"Thank you, I cannot stay; but I wanted to see you for a few minutes — can you spare them?"

"Oh yes, or half an hour, if my guests keep me waiting so long. Sit down, pray. I thought you had been still at Marylands — any news? Our fair friend well, I hope?" said he, with an easy air. One of the chief objections Ninian had to Mr. Ulverston was the careless tone in which he always spoke of women.

"Miss Ansted is well. It was by her desire I came to you to-night."

"By her desire. How flattering!" He laughed, but there was a quick flush on his cheek; and, as might be expected, Mr. Ulverston was a man not prone to blushing in general. "Well, go on, deliver the message. But really she need not have troubled you — I should have preferred one of the pretty epistles that come from her fair hands."

Ninian writhed under the insinuation, even though in his heart of hearts he disbelieved it altogether. Hope, with her delicate feelings, with the terror she seemed to express lest Mr. Ulverston should offer her marriage, would never surely have written to him, or only by some trivial, unavoidable chance.

"She bade me," continued Mr. Græme, anxious to begin the subject of his visit, and thereby end it sooner, — "she bade me inform you of the misfortune which has happened to her father."

"What — anything sudden? A fit of apoplexy, perhaps? I always thought it would be so." And Mr. Ulverston's eyes sparkled with something very like satisfaction.

"No, not exactly; Mr. Ansted is alive and well."

"Really! But, between ourselves, if this *had* occurred — Poh! what a fellow that Ansted is to be the father of such a charming girl! So he is neither dead nor dying?"

"No, but something that to many men seems worse. He is ruined."

Mr. Ulverston started, and a slight discomposure was visible on his face. "You don't say so? Why, not three days ago the fellow was telling me — Impossible! It can't be true."

"I have said it," was Ninian's answer.

Mr. Ulverston made no reply. For once, he seemed to lose control over himself. His colour flushed and went; he bit his lips, and his manner was that of a man extremely irritated and annoyed.

"Upon my soul, this is news! Ruined, did you say? Many a rich fellow who lives freely is at times pressed for money — I have been so myself — but that is not

being *ruined*. — Just explain old Ansted's predicament, will you?"

"Simply this; — he has been living beyond his means; last night he was arrested; his debts prove to be much more than by any means he can pay, and I have induced him to go through the Insolvent Court."

"The devil you have! What disgrace! Couldn't it be hushed up in any way? I am not exactly a Crœsus myself, but if one could lend a helping hand to the old fellow —"

"You seem very much interested concerning him."

The young man darted a quick angry look, and paused, as if he hardly knew whether to be indignant or confidential. He chose the latter.

"My dear fellow, you know I am not of a reserved nature; all about me is plain and aboveboard. Come, I'll be frank with you. It is not likely I should visit the Ansteds as I have done these many months, merely for love of that vulgar, prosy, upstart of a father?"

"I did not suppose it."

"There must have been good blood on the mother's side, as I hear there was, — or else however could that contemptible old fool have such a bewitching little girl for a daughter? So, the murder will out, Græme! What a creature it is! with its exquisite beauty, and its provoking, innocent, quiet ways. I vow I never was in love with any woman in my life as I could be with Hope Ansted."

"Possibly!" The set lips opened and closed again upon the one word. Ninian sat looking into the fire as heretofore.

"'*Possibly!*' A deal you know about the matter! Græme, you are the most impracticable, frigid old fellow!

How many centuries is it since you were in love yourself, eh? How old you would look going a-wooing with that solemn W. S. face, as your witty little sister used to call it." And a hearty fit of laughter restored the variable young Irishman from his passing irritation to his usual volatile mood.

"Will you tell me, Mr. Ulverston, if you are in jest or earnest — in what you said just now?"

"About little Hope? In earnest — solemn earnest! But you put the question as gravely as if you were her father himself come to demand my 'intentions.' Do look a little more sympathetic when a fellow comes and makes confessions to you! I can't imagine what there is about you that coaxes one into confidence. I do believe I'd trust you with anything, if you were a thought less saturnine and severe."

"Pardon me; I have just now many things to make me grave."

"So have I. But tell me more about old Ansted," and his former look of vexation returned. "By Heaven! I am glad this happened to-day. Do you know, I was so thoroughly taken in by that sweet little witch, that I believe I should have committed myself to-morrow. There's no use to try mere harmless flirting with her; she can't understand it. I had nearly made up my mind, merry bachelor as I am, to yield, and put my neck under the yoke."

"You mean, in plain words, that you intended — that is, wished — to marry her?"

Ulverston nodded his head, and lifted his eyebrows pathetically. "Just so. A fellow can't help himself, you know."

Ninian was silent, lest one word should let loose the torrent of passion that he felt within him.

"It would have been a foolish act at best," continued Mr. Ulverston. "Something of a *mésalliance*, as regarded my family, though the girl herself is lady-like, and I could have got rid of the father — found him some appointment abroad, where he might drink himself to death comfortably and nobody be the wiser. I do believe I should soon have 'done the deed,' and turned Benedick."

"And now?"

Mr. Ulverston drew up his elegant person, and looked the young Norman baron to the life. "I marry Hope Ansted? I volunteer to be son-in-law to a low, spendthrift insolvent? No, no, Græme, I have not quite forgotten myself yet. I own I was growing a great fool, but I wash my hands of the matter for ever." And he hummed the tune of Lochinvar —

"'There are maidens in Scotland more lovely by far,'"

stopped — frowned — "Pshaw! no cursed coarse Scotswoman for me. Really, Græme, excuse me. I only mean to say I prefer an Englishwoman, but certainly that Englishwoman will not be Miss Ansted."

"Then," said Ninian — and the great relief in his mind made his manner more cordial — "I conclude the second half of my message will be needless. It was to request that you would not come down to Arlington to-morrow, as she is staying at Lady Ulverston's, and would rather not see you."

"She said so, did she? What a little minx!" This faint repulsion seemed to revive all his passion. He rose from his seat, and began to pace the room. "By Jove,

to think of her sending me such a message! And she is staying at Sir Peter's, you said? I have a great mind to —"

"What?"

"No matter! I really must get over this folly. It is to be hoped she will do the same, poor little girl."

A wild fear seized Ninian. "Speak truly," said he. "How far has this matter gone? Have you any reason to believe that she loves you? Tell me, on your honour as a gentleman."

Perhaps Mr. Ulverston objected to a lie, unless it was quite necessary; perhaps he feared the result of his visitor's stern sense of right, and had a doubt of being compelled to matrimony. In either case, his answer proved the same; a straightforward, apparently honest, "No!"

"I am glad of it. I should not like to think you a man who could deceive a woman," said Ninian Græme.

For a moment the other seemed to start and cower before him; but soon recovered himself.

"Upon my honour, this conversation is getting too serious for me. You're an awful personage to deal with, Mr. Græme. Come — some more news! How does our fair friend bear her tribulations?"

"Well and patiently."

"Poor little thing! What will she do, I wonder? Go out as a governess? She is far too pretty for that. I don't think I ever knew such a lovely mignonne face. And what delicious hands and feet! A figure too slight, perhaps; but the daintiest little fairy to waltz with! Good Heavens! no wonder I was half mad after her — I shall be again, if I don't mind."

The young man said this by fits and starts, talking

more to himself than aloud. His cheek burned and whitened, his eyes glittered; he was evidently under the strong influence of something, which if not love was at least the passion which he had all his life been accustomed to ennoble by that name.

"I don't think I can give her up," he went on in a low voice. "Oh! these cursed conventionalities. It's hard enough for a man to be tied down to one woman, whom he marries just to please the world; — but to marry and be ashamed to face the world! I declare to you, Græme, I would do anything to have that girl. If she were only high enough in station to do me credit as my wife — or low enough, so that one could avoid offering her that formal name —"

The words were scarce uttered, when Ninian leaped up with the spring of a tiger. Before he knew what he was doing, he had seized Ulverston by the throat, and stood over him in a dumbness of fury that was terrible.

"Hold off! You're mad, I think! do you mean to kill me?" gasped the young man, swaying like a child in Ninian's powerful grasp. The words brought the latter to his right mind.

He let go his hold, and stood upright, facing Ulverston, glaring down upon him — his face livid with a passion that was still unable to find utterance.

There was no need. The two men, looking at each other, felt that they were henceforth foes and knew the reason why.

Ulverston muttered something about "his honour as a gentleman."

"Your honour as a gentleman! Where is your honour as a man, when you could speak so of any woman?"

"And what right have you —" Here Mr. Ulverston's voice ceased in a perfect paroxysm of rage.

By this time Ninian had recovered his self-command. He said, more calmly, "Perhaps I went too far; but you goaded me on. You must retract these words."

"I will not! You — to rise up and attack a man in his own house — you are a coward! There!"

He lifted his hand to strike the shameful blow which men hold as a dishonour only to be washed out by blood; but Ninian, with his great strength, grasped the young man's two hands and held them fast as in a vice.

"You shall not strike me — and I will not fight; I hold a duellist to be a murderer. But you shall promise me, on your honour, that you will not attempt to see" — his tongue clove to his mouth, and refused to utter the name — "to see her again, or else —"

"Do you threaten?"

"Or else — though I know not what your past life may have been, except from your own chance hints, which have not implied much good — I will hunt out your whole history, and know whether it answers to those evil words of yours. Do you understand me?"

He did, more than Ninian had ever dreamed. His knees shook, and in his face was the pale answer of an accusing conscience. Doubtless, in some way the chance arrow had struck home.

Comedy and tragedy, life's jests, and its doom, ever follow after one another. While the two men stood thus, there was heard the knocking that announced Mr. Ulverston's merry troop of more than doubtful guests.

"I will go now," said Ninian Græme, loosing Ulverston's hand. "We never can be friends more."

"No! foes — implacable foes!"

"I should be sorry for that; I used to say I had not an enemy in the world," answered Ninian, half sorrowfully. "If I thought I had misjudged you, or if, knowing you had erred, I could also know you had repented, still I would hold out to you this hand."

Nay, he even did so, from some vague impulse that made him unwilling to part in anger from the young man.

But Ulverston drew back, and the proffered hand, like a blessing refused, returned to its owner's bosom.

Without another word, Ninian left the man who had been, if not his friend, at least his companion. In descending he met the entering guests, and stood aside to let them go by. "Mademoiselle" gave him a titter, a ballet-curtsey, a sweep of her silk robe — and passed.

Truly there are often such strange meetings on the world's vast staircase, where, in the words of the nursery rhyme,

"Some go up, and others go down."

CHAPTER V.

It so happened, that having all Mr. Ansted's business on his hands, Ninian was detained in London for a whole week. This cost him much regret, since, from some vague scruple or distrust of himself, he had resolved not to see his little Hope again until he came with Lindsay to take her home to The Gowans. Nor could he hear from her, as he had told her to write to Edinburgh, whither day by day he expected to journey. Perhaps he would not have been so much at ease regarding her, had he not heard accidentally that Mr. Ulverston had suddenly given up his chambers and gone to the Continent. Hope was safe then from any wooing, fair or foul. And one or two brief notes that she wrote to her father were tokens that she was well. Her faithful guardian compelled himself to rest satisfied, and worked day and night in Mr. Ansted's affairs, until at last he got them somewhat clear.

Then, with a sense of relief impossible to describe, he threw himself into the express train that has won the benediction of many an eager traveller, and started off for Edinburgh.

Somewhere between Derby and Normanton, he remembered that for four days he had not seen his brother and Dr. Reay; but these things were unimportant now. He never thought of the matter again, until he saw, sauntering at the Edinburgh terminus, with his old, dreamy lounging gait, and melancholy look, the worthy Professor.

"Kenneth? Is that you or your wraith? Who would have thought it! Why did you not tell me you were coming to Scotland?"

"I don't know; where was the use of it?" said Kenneth, despondently.

"In the first place, we might have travelled together and been cheerful by the way."

The Professor sighed. There seemed to hang over him a heavy cloud. Ninian remembered how dull he had appeared some fews days ago, and thought with compunction how disregardful he himself had since been of his old friend.

"Kenneth," said he, kindly, "is anything the matter? Are you ill? What is the reason of this sudden journey?"

"It is on account of these;" and he touched his eyes.

Ninian recollected what he had scarce noticed at the time, how the Professor had complained of his sight once or twice. But Reay was such a quiet, undemonstrative fellow, who never said a word more than necessary, especially about his corporeal self. Whatever ailed him, mentally or bodily, no one was any the wiser. He bore it, and never said a word.

"Have your eyes been worse?" asked Ninian, anxiously.

"Yes. I went to an oculist at last. I thought it would be as well."

"And what did he say?"

Reay faltered, and his lip quivered. "It's no use looking out for my new planet, Græme. Little good was ever done to science by a *blind* astronomer."

"Good God! You don't mean that. It is impossible."

Kenneth shook his head mournfully. "Quite possible.

I have thought so a long time. But if it must be, it must be. Never mind."

There was something so pathetic in this hopeless resignation, that Ninian felt a woman-like choking in his throat.

"I will not believe it. There must be some hope. Did not the oculist say so?"

"Oh, of course; doctors always do. He told me if I put aside all study, never used my eyes for months, but just travelled about — However, I know better. Do not let us talk any more about it. Good-by."

And he was walking away in his melancholy, absent manner, when Ninian detained him. "You cannot think that I shall let you off in this way, old friend? Where do you intend to travel?"

"Anywhere, so that it is in Scotland. I wished to make haste and see the hills and the lochs once more — that I might remember them afterwards."

Ninian wrung his friend's hand; in so doing, every lingering of the woman in his heart — and there is no good man's heart that has not a little of the woman in it — yearned over Kenneth Reay.

"Cheer up, old fellow," said he, at last. "Things may not be so bad as you suppose. You must obey orders, and give up work."

"It is easy to talk," answered Reay, musing; "I, that used to say a man should never give up working while he lived. And I'm not so old as I seem; I'm not forty yet. It is rather hard."

Ninian, suddenly picturing to himself the future of this lonely, self-enclosed, self-dependent existence, acknowledged that it was hard.

For the moment, his own cares slipped from him,

and his mind was filled with the thought of Kenneth's trouble.

"I tell you what, Reay, I will not part from you here. You shall go home with me to-night, and be cheered by my womankind; Lindsay will be very kind to you; and Tinie —"

He paused, noticing the sudden changing of the Professor's countenance; he had forgotten one half of the poor fellow's griefs.

"I think," he added, "that Tinie is staying with her married sisters. There will be only Lindsay and Charlie at The Gowans. Nay, but you must come."

The Professor lingered, hesitated, — at last yielded. "Anyhow, I think I should like *to see* them all once more," said he, with a mournful meaning in the phrase.

So Ninian carried him off unresistingly.

Unluckily, in spite of the elder brother's conviction, Lindsay was not at home, and that wild, mischievous, wilful Tinie was. She gave immediate token of the fact by her cry of delight in the hall, and her arms almost smothering Ninian the moment he descended.

Now, for some months past, all things had not been quite as heretofore between Mr. Græme and his pet sister. A slight reserve on his part — on hers an occasional wilfulness, a restlessness that made her shrink from home, and take to all sorts of gaieties abroad — had effected some trifling change in the relation that had once been so close and fond. It was many weeks since Tinie had sprung to him as tenderly as she did now. But absence is a good teacher sometimes.

"Ah! I was wiser than sister Lindsay. I knew you would be here to-night!" cried she; "and what is the

news of London? How is Edmund — and Hope — and Miss Reay — and the —"

Possibly she was about to say "the Professor," when the sudden vision of his real presence took the word out of her mouth. Miss Tinie gave an undisguised start, turned as pale as if she had seen a ghost, and then began to laugh violently. Lastly, waking up to a consciousness of her own dignity, she favoured her old instructor with a gracious welcome, and inquired, half in jest, half in earnest, why, after this long interval of time, she had the honour of seeing him there?

Kenneth, making some incomprehensible answer, walked in, pale and quiet; and took his old corner by the fire, just as if he had not been away a week.

"Any letters, Tinie?" asked Ninian, eagerly, looking in the place where they usually lay. There was one from Hope, a brief note, dated the morning after he had left her, full of gratitude, affection, and content. Still he wondered she had not written since; but perhaps she might to-morrow. He must not be too exacting over his darling. So he sat down to wait until Lindsay came home, and to think how much he should tell her of Hope's troubles, and of his own thoughts and plans concerning the child.

Meanwhile Tinie, with flushed cheek, and gay, excited manner, went about the household cares, in which, to say the least, she was not very expert. At intervals she laughed and chattered with Kenneth Reay, tormenting him with more than her former pertinacity; but in every jest there seemed an under-lying bitterness which increased the more according as he grew silent and absent. At last he seemed too dull to mind her at all.

"Well, and what have you done this long while in London? You are growing the greatest man there, I suppose? And you have left your old hobby of geology, and taken to Astronomy? Have you settled your favourite subject, the parallax of the fixed stars?"

Kenneth Reay sighed, but it was not on account of her and her teasing. He was evidently not thinking of Tinie at all. Possibly, the greater pain had conquered the less. His devotion to science was after all the truest passion of his soul, and the fear of a lost life was more terrible than that of a lost love.

"How miserable you look," said Tinie, getting wicked. "Come, be polite, and help me a little. Take the kettle and pour out some water."

He obeyed, rising up, and walking with a mechanical step, putting his hands out as if uncertain of his movements.

"Take care, Professor, — how careless you are; you'll scald me in a minute," cried Tinie, springing aside. "I declare you go about as if you were blind."

At the word he started, set down his awkward burden, and said in a slow melancholy voice,

"That is true, Miss Tinie, quite true; God help me!" He put his hand over his eyes, and walked out of the room unsteadily, like one thoroughly crushed with woe.

"What have I done? What is the matter?" cried Tinie, half-pettishly, half-anxiously. But Ninian, passing her with one of the most reproving even angry looks that she had ever seen him wear, followed his friend.

He returned a few minutes afterwards, and found her sitting in her place, very dolefully. Seeing him, she tried to laugh.

"Well — now, perhaps, brother; you will condescend to explain why your beloved Doctor Reay has grown so very dignified, and you so very particular. As if I were not allowed to tease him, indeed! I that have done so ever since I was a little girl."

"You ought to cease now — and I desire you will. He is in no mood for trifling. There is great trouble come upon poor Kenneth Reay."

Tinie was but a woman; and though once more she said, jestingly, "What's the matter?" her little face turned very pale, and her hand shook.

"What you so thoughtlessly said was true. I am afraid that very soon he will be quite blind."

The girl started up in her chair. "I'll not believe it."

But when she saw how grave and sad Ninian looked, she sank down again. He explained all.

"It is a terrible thing for Kenneth, and he feels it very much. Not so much for the ruin of his worldly prospects, because he wants little, and will always have enough to live upon; but because, to all intents and purposes, his career in science is at an end. If he had any friend to be to him in the place of eyes and help him in his work, that at least some remnant of sight might be saved — but he has no one. I hardly know any man in the world more thoroughly lonely than he is, or soon will be. Tinie, the little you see of him — and I shall take care that you see him as little as possible — I entreat and desire that you say no word which might wound his feelings. He is not a fit subject for your jests — a man broken-hearted and blind."

All this time Tinie had listened in silence — her eyes fixed and distended. At the last word they closed

— her head sank in her hands, and she burst into an uncontrollable passion of tears.

Ninian was utterly astonished. Was it possible that she cared for him then — him whom she had refused and even ridiculed? Had she, gay young creature as she was, turned from her hosts of adorers to love this quaint, uncourtly, middle-aged follower of science? If so, it was one of the numerous eccentricities of women's affections, a theory of probabilities which never will be worked out till the world's end.

Ninian looked at his favourite sister, who still sat crying bitterly. There was no mistaking her emotion now. He hardly knew whether he was glad or sorry, but he was certainly deeply moved.

"Tinie, I think I guess all. Be candid with your brother. You know poor Kenneth has had but one attachment all his life, and that was —"

"I know. He told me," she said, between her sobs.

"You are sorry now for what you threw away — is it so?"

She made no answer, but sobbed on.

"Would you marry him now, if he asked you?" said Ninian, in plain words, for he felt the case was urgent. "Answer, honestly, yes or no?"

Some trace of her former spirit flashed in Tinie's eyes, and she seemed unwilling to reply.

"Forgive me; the question is not mine to put, and, perhaps, after all, things are best as they are. He is getting an old man — old before his time."

"I do not think so," said she, resolutely.

"This misfortune stops his career. He might have

been the greatest man of the day; now he will never make a higher reputation than he has already made."

"That is not so very small, I believe," was the answer, as Tinie drew herself up, rather proudly, and ceased crying.

"If you married him, think what your life would be! In everything he would have to depend on you. True, he has a noble heart, pure and good as ever man's was; but some of these days — ay, and before very long — he will grow feeble and aged."

"No matter!"

"He will be as eccentric as ever; moreover, helpless and blind."

"What do I care!" cried Tinie, defiantly, dashing her hands from her eyes, and rising up, until there was something heroic in her small figure, and something of beautiful earnestness in her face. "What do I care for that, brother Ninian!"

But he held out his arms to her, smiling; whereupon the little Amazon threw herself into them, and wept her wilfulness away. So the elder brother knew that he would have to give away his last sister, his pet for many years. Embracing her, he felt that in neither's heart did the other hold the first place now. It was natural — quite natural! Still, as he kissed her forehead, and called her his "wee thing," his voice faltered and his eyelids were moist.

"There, we'll not be sentimental, my pet. Now, what is to be done next? — must I go and tell him?"

"No, no!"

And Ninian, with a fellow-feeling for his old friend,

thought it was even best that Kenneth should find out his happiness for himself.

He merely went and called him from the study. The worthy soul came in, he seemed to have forgotten his sudden emotion, and was his old self again. He never stirred from his corner, and scarcely spoke, — except once, when that wayward damsel brought him his tea, an act of kindly attention quite unprecedented on her part.

"Thank you, Miss Christina, you are very good." And looking up, he discovered her gentle penitential air. Perhaps, too — unless his poor blind eyes were very dim indeed — he saw hers, swimming with tears that could not be restrained. He started, and over his plain weatherbeaten face came a quivering. "I hope I have not offended you? It was very wrong in me," said the Professor, humbly.

"No, it was all my fault. But I did not mean —" Here Tinie abruptly retreated to the table, where, in her contrite confusion, she managed slowly to pour the whole contents of the teapot into the sugar-basin — a disaster which formed the principal event of the meal.

Tea was at last over. Ninian, full of his own thoughts, had retreated to his arm-chair, to long for Lindsay's coming. He almost ceased to notice his companions, else perhaps he might have been amused by the pretty womanly pacifications with which Tinie sought to make atonement for the wound she had given.

But nothing could draw poor Kenneth out of his despondent mood. However, he answered her conversation, which was timid and meek to a degree quite comical in Miss Tinie. He even moved from his corner to

look over some new mathematical books she brought, to show him she had not been quite idle in those studies which formed such a curious contrast to her volatility of character. Of her fancy for which studies perhaps the solution was, — what in nine cases out of ten is the solution of a woman's favourite pursuits.

A scientific book was an infallible temptation to Kenneth Reay. Forgetting the doom that haunted him, he shaded his enfeebled eyes with his hand, and began eagerly to read.

"Nay, you must not do that, you know," whispered Tinie, as she drew the book away.

Kenneth sank back in his chair with a bitter, bitter sigh.

If any one had seen the expression of Tinie's face, as, kneeling by the table, she turned and looked at him, — it would have won forgiveness for all her little faults. There was the woman's nature in her still.

"You must not be so unhappy. I know all. Never mind. We'll help you to bear it," said she, in a broken voice.

"Thank you, but nobody can help me. I must bear it myself. I may get used to it in time, if it is slow in coming. Some have been contented with it. (He always said "it," as if the plain word *blindness* were by him unutterable). "There was Huber, for instance;" — and he stopped.

They both knew Huber's story — how a devoted wife was to him "eyes to the blind;" and how happily the philosopher lived in his long darkness, leaving behind him a renowned name. It was an allusion that struck Kenneth painfully, and heavier and gloomier became his silence.

"Ah!" murmured Tinie, every sense of pride overcome by pity, "it breaks my heart to see you so sad. We'll comfort you; you shall come to live in Edinburgh again; you shall teach me as you used to do; and I will try to improve, that I may write and read to you. Oh! if you would but forgive me!" Still kneeling, she held out her hands in childlike humility.

Kenneth Reay at first seemed totally bewildered; then his apathy broke down, and his manhood, with its one deep passion, struggled into life.

"Miss Christina — little Tinie, do not make game of me! You are a young, merry lassie; I a poor, lonely man, growing old and blind."

"Kenneth!" — She laid her forehead on his hard, broad hand, and, whether he saw or not, the Professor might have felt her tears.

Just then Tinie's elder brother woke up from his meditations to the knowledge of what was passing. A wise man was Ninian Græme! So he did the wisest and best thing he could have done under the circumstances — he quietly rose, and walked out of the room.

CHAPTER VI.

THERE were no confessions made to Lindsay that night; for she came home in time only to hear a full account of what, in a brief letter, Ninian had already told her — the change which had fallen upon the Ansteds. It was not until next day after breakfast, when the brother and sister were sitting in that most anxious of all employments, waiting for the post, that Mr. Græme found courage to begin what he had to unfold unto that patient ear — open to him, almost like a mother's, during his whole life.

There was Tinie's little episode first. From the parlour-window they saw her tripping about in the spring morning, sometimes flitting hither and thither in her butterfly fashion, but oftener coming to the Professor's side, with the evident feeling that there she would soon fold her gossamer wings and settle down into a new form of existence. As for Kenneth Reay himself, he looked a new man. He seemed to have grown ten years younger. He walked with head erect, as if courting the sun to shine upon him and his happiness. For the time being he had forgotten his blindness, his despondency, his fear. Well! against the shadow came again, perhaps he might be able to meet it.

Poor fellow? — It is a strange truth — true alike to both men and women, one which all feel, while few will confess — that though the human heart may know *peace*, content, serene endurance, even thankfulness, it

never does and never can know *happiness*, — the sense of complete, full-rounded bliss — except in the joy of happy love. It may be or have been — a mere gleam, brief as a moment; but for the time it was a taste of heaven, the most perfect that ever can be known here.

There is a little poem of Chamisso, called "The Three Sisters." Each, crushed with misery, contends that her own lot has been the hardest to bear. One, Death has bereaved of her lover; another mourns over her fallen idol's shame. The third, speaking of the two, says, envyingly, "*Have they not lived and loved?*" —

> "'In one brief sentence all my bitter cause
> Of sorrow dwells; then, arbiter, oh! pause,
> Ere yet thy final judgment thou assign,
> And learn my better right, too clearly proved;
> Four words comprise it — *I was never loved!*
> The palm of grief, thou wilt allow, is mine,'"

Chamisso knew humanity. There can be no grief like that grief!

Possibly, Ninian Græme might never have read this poem. But something of its spirit touched him now, as he watched his sister and his friend, and longed for the time when his own life, now incomplete, should be perfected with such a moment of joy. Perhaps, this was a feeling more akin to a woman's sentiment than to a man's passion; but in its holy tenderness and self-renunciation, Ninian's love had all along shared much of the womanly character — at least, the ideal of a woman's love. Which, alas! we may in vain look for among a score of Miss Smiths or Miss Browns, any more than we may look for the heroic devotion, the manly faithfulness, the life-long truth, of the men of old, in the Mr. Smiths and Mr. Browns that we meet in society. Yet love is love, and faithfulness is faithfulness. Ay, and both exist

sometimes, to prove that all life and all goodness is not a delusive poetic dream.

But we must go back to Ninian and his sister, standing at the window, watching the two, who, though a couple strangely contrasted, might evidently come under the category of true lovers.

"You see how it is, Lindsay," said Ninian smiling. "I thought it was so, on Reay's side at least, — long ago. We will soon have the last of our young birds taking wing, and you and I will be left in the nest alone."

Miss Græme did not quite understand at first. When her brother had further enlightened her innocent mind on the state of affairs, she was considerably affected.

"Do you really mean that Tinie loves in earnest at last? Poor child! Was that the reason that she came to my bedside last night, kissed me, and cried, though she said she was very happy? I thought it was because you were come home."

"Not quite," smiled the elder brother, though he lightly sighed, — which he felt the while to be a piece of most unwarrantable jealousy.

"So Kenneth has loved her all these years! And to think of her having refused, liking him all the while, — I cannot understand that!" said the perplexed Lindsay, whose simple nature was indeed not likely to understand the vagaries of such a character as Tinie's.

"Still, 'All's well that ends well.' We ought to be glad and satisfied, sister. Kenneth will make a much better husband for our Tinie than any of her other swains; and she is fond of him, poor lassie!"

"But then he is so old — seventeen or eighteen years older than herself. I think people who marry *ought to* be of equal age."

"I do not see that," answered Ninian in a low voice, as the colour rose slightly on his cheek. "When a man has passed his youth, and become tried and hardened, perhaps embittered, in the world, he is the more likely to love some young creature who brings back to his memory everything that he has ceased to be. Do you not think so, Lindsay?"

Anxiously he looked at her, fancying, as all who hold a close, dear secret fancy, that she must surely be divining what he meant to reveal. But she was watching the couple on the lawn.

"It is very strange, certainly!" said she, *à propos* of nothing, or of her own meditation.

"Not at all strange. There is no inequality in such a marriage. He gives her wisdom, experience, steady and faithful love, such as few young men ever feel; she gives him freshness, cheerfulness, and hope. She comes to him 'like the dew of his youth.' Think, Lindsay," and there was a trembling in Ninian's voice — "think how sweet it must be, when one is tired with battling against the world, to have a loving little creature creeping close to one's heart, driving out everything amiss there, and making one feel young again! How one would protect her, — how she would be not only a cherished wife, but something like the poor man's pet-lamb in the Bible-story — the one ewe-lamb, 'that was unto him as a daughter.'"

While Ninian talked thus, leaning against the side of the window, his countenance wore a strangely softened beauty. Lindsay looked surprised, but still her mind was too full of Tinie's affairs to enter into speculations of any other kind.

Ninian saw that he must explain himself more

clearly. He might do so, for now the wooing and wedding of his youngest sister took away the last of his cares. There was no reason why his marriage should not immediately follow hers. And Lindsay, — who had ever shown such tender affection over his darling, — surely it would add to Lindsay's happiness if he brought Hope to The Gowans "for gude and a'."

The Gowans should be their home then. He thought Hope would choose it so; she had such a tenderness for the dear old place. They would never part with Lindsay, either. With her gentle spirit, there was no fear of her turning out that dreaded personage, an overbearing sister-in-law living in the house. She would be, as she had always been, like a mother in affection. It might even make her happier, when, all her young flock being dispersed, there would spring up a new generation for the solitary woman to fold in her arms, and yearn over with the yearnings which those only know who mingle therewith the solemn remembrance of what to themselves might have been — and is denied evermore. Ninian felt instinctively what would be the love of his sister towards his children.

His children! At the thought all the strong man's soul was bowed within him; its infinite emotion was almost too mighty to bear.

Mr. Græme stood for many minutes by his sister's side in silence.

"The post is late to-day," Lindsay said, "I wonder if it will bring a letter from dear little Hope."

"Probably."

Why on that hint Ninian did not speak, was a circumstance known only to himself. But he felt agitated, trembling, overpowered even by the timidity of a boy.

"Lindsay," said he at length, "our house will be very lonely soon."

"It will indeed!" sighed the elder sister. "But Tinie may not marry just yet."

"I think she will. Kenneth entreated me so, last night. Perhaps, if he could have some one always near to aid him, his eyesight might be saved — at least partially. Look at Tinie now! She will be a devoted little wife to him."

Miss Græme looked, and once more sighed. "Ay, she seems full of content, but it is hard to lose her. I cannot see why all our children should go and marry."

"Still," answered Ninian, gently, "a happy marriage is the happiest thing on earth. No true, unselfish brother or sister would stand in the way of that."

"Oh, no!" And Lindsay became thoughtful.

"After all, sister, you and I ought to thank God for the lightening of our cares. Our three sisters provided for — Edmund settled too; for, as you know, he is determined to be nothing but an author, and is very successful already. Besides, Reay tells me he will not part with him."

"Good Kenneth," murmured Miss Græme. Her eyes brightened at the mention of her darling boy.

"Then, Reuben is doing well in the world; and we shall have him near us — though I scarcely think he will care to live at home again. And for Charlie, if the boy must go to sea, why he must! Nothing else will satisfy him. Perhaps it is for the best! He may be an admiral yet."

Her own faint smile again lightened Our Sister's face. The young scapegrace had given her many

cares; but he was the last born of the flock, and she loved him.

"Well, as I said before, when all our youngsters are flown away, you and I will be very lonely, Lindsay."

"Not if we do as you hinted last night, and take poor Hope back to The Gowans for a little. I should be so glad. But then she might do like the rest," added the troubled elder sister — "she might go away and marry."

"She need not," answered Ninian, his firm lips quivering, as he knew the moment was come when he must speak in audible words the secret he had kept so carefully and so long. But Lindsay interrupted him.

"Ah — there is the postman! Perhaps he brings letters from that dear child. I must run and see."

She left the room with quick, eager step. But Ninian's feet seemed glued to the earth where he stood.

"Letters — plenty! And here is one in her own hand addressed to me. Wait while I open it, brother."

It is strange — and each and all of us may have proved this — that at some crisis of fulfilled expectation we seem frost-bound. We cannot stir a step to meet the coming guest, or to snatch at the long-desired letter; we grow cold all over — powerless and silent.

Thus Ninian stood, while Lindsay opened the letter.

He was still at the window, looking out at the sunny garden and the flowers, lest, perhaps, his sister should look at him. A little disappointment he felt. Why did Hope write to Lindsay only?

Miss Græme read a page or more. "She is quite well" — Ninian turned — "and happy, too; says how much she thinks of us all, and how kind you have

been." He turned back again abruptly; then crossed the room, sat down, and opened the leaves of a book.

"Read on, sister. I would like to hear —"

But Lindsay had stopped — tears starting in her eyes. "Oh, brother, here is news — glad news of our dear child. She is engaged to be married."

There was one quick shudder — a blank, incredulous stare; but Ninian sat in his seat motionless.

Miss Græme continued, "It is so sudden, so unexpected, she says. Amidst all her misfortunes, too! Who would have thought that? But Ninian — do you hear? Ninian!"

He lifted his head, and looked her full in the face. The countenance she then saw his sister never forgot to her dying day.

"Brother — brother?"

"Yes!" The voice sounded unnatural — awful.

"Oh my poor brother!" Lindsay cried. She understood all now.

There was no more spoken. His head fell again upon his arms; he neither groaned nor moved. For many minutes his sister sat watching him thus, not daring by word or gesture to break upon the hush of such a grief.

At last, he stirred a little — passed his hand over his forehead, as if to remove some bewilderment there — looked up and saw his sister.

He tried to smile. "Well, Lindsay?"

She did not answer, but came to him — this eldest sister who so loved him! She took his hand; and then seeing that he was quite passive, she put her arms round his neck as she had done when he was a boy. He leant against her; and falling one by one upon her

black dress she saw his tears — those tears which a man sometimes pours out like drops of his life-blood. At last they stopped — so did hers, too; and the brother and sister drew apart from each other, without having said a word.

Nor ever afterwards did either, by questioning or by confession, break that solemn silence.

Ninian rose and sat upright in his chair. His eyes glancing round, fell upon the half-read letter. He pointed to it. "Now, sister, go on."

Lindsay hesitated, and looked with a feeling of repulsion at the fatal writing.

"Go on — read it aloud," said Ninian, with that quiet voice which every one obeyed.

Lindsay read. There was a page of overflowing affection — tenderer even than Hope's wont towards the whole family — Ninian most of all. And then she came, hesitatingly, as a timid girl would, to the news of her engagement. On the very evening of the day when she last wrote to Mr. Græme, this change in her destiny had come. The same night she wrote to Lindsay, in womanly shyness choosing her rather than her brother, to whom to tell these tidings.

"I am happy," ran the letter. "Yes, I think I am happy! I always liked Mr. Ulverston — he was so kind to me. But I was terrified lest, fancying I was rich, he should ask me to marry him, as papa wished, and then find out how greatly he had been deceived. I never would have married him then. But now, when we have been ruined, and he knows me to be nothing but a penniless girl — for him to come and seek me — oh! it is so noble — so generous! I ought to love him, dear Lindsay! and I suppose — yes — I think I do.

"Besides, I have no home; for, kind as Mr. Græme is, I know it would be wrong for me to burden him by living at The Gowans. He had so many cares and worked so hard, as I remember well. No, it is better that there is somebody who loves me and will take me home, and whom I will try to make happy always.

"Mr. Ulverston will be very kind to my father too, if he promises to live always in America. But he says — that is, Mr. Ulverston says — he can do nothing until we are married, which must be very soon. It is strange — oh, Lindsay, I tremble! But I am so desolate and unprotected, and he so generous! And then he loves me so!

"He will post this letter himself, for I said I must write and inform you, and my dear guardian and brother. What will Mr. Græme say to my marriage? I think he will be pleased — Mr. Ulverston tells me he will. I hope he will not fancy what I said about not marrying Mr. Ulverston was false — I spoke my true feelings, at the time.

"Write to me soon, dearest friends! I am not quite happy until I hear from you. I cannot tell you more. Mr. Ulverston is very anxious to hasten our marriage; but I do not know when it will take place."

"It is not too late, then," cried Ninian, suddenly roused. "Perhaps, if she knew all — We must save her, Lindsay — save her."

"But — she loves him," said Lindsay, mournfully.

"I do not believe it." And all Ninian's strong clear mind seemed to come into him again, as if it were another that suffered and not he — so mighty above all things was his guardian tenderness over the child. "She likes him — she is grateful to him — he has such

winning ways. But if she only knew him truly — No, it is impossible. Hope could not love that man."

And then, so far as passion allowed him utterance, he told his sister of what had passed between himself and Mr. Ulverston, on the last night they met.

"Look now what he has done! He has spread the report that he was gone abroad, and stolen down secretly to that child. He proposes to marry her — poor and disgraced as she is! Very generous! Very honourable! except that he is all false — he must be. If he marries her, he will make her wretched; if" — Ninian ground his teeth together, struggling against the fierce passion that shook him. "And all that while I was in London, and knew nothing!"

Lindsay sat silent and trembling. She was terrified to see her brother thus.

"Give me the letter; let me see the date. It should have reached us — four — five — six days ago. He has kept it back, you see."

"Oh, brother," cried Lindsay, shuddering at the expression of Ninian's face.

"Hush! let me think." He put his hand over his brow, violently striving to repress every feeling but that of clear judgment. He took Hope's letter with unshrinking hand, and read it all through himself, — with those poor eyes yet scorching from the fiery drops they had shed. At last he rose, and walked steadily to Lindsay's side.

"I know what must be done. You and I must start for London at once. You will stay with the child till — till her marriage. For that man — I will find out all his past life, as I told him I should. If he is a villain, which I truly believe, though I am clear of

nothing, he shall not marry her. I say he shall not! If I have wronged him — if she loves him — then — you and I can stay for the marriage, Lindsay."

What a tone it was! what a smile!

"Now, get ready," he continued. "You see there is not a moment to be lost. We must start immediately. You can manage it, can you not? Everything can be as we planned last night."

And he paused, as if the contrast thus suddenly presented smote him with a keen pang.

"We can leave this afternoon," said Lindsay. "Only I would like just time enough to send for Esther or Ruth."

"What matters that?" was Ninian's sharp answer; and then he held out his hand to his sister. "You must bear with me, Lindsay; I am not quite myself."

Then seeming afraid that he had too much betrayed his feelings, he went to the table and began to glance over the letters that were still untouched. One or two he carelessly thrust to Lindsay — "Read them, sister, it will save a little time."

The first she opened made her cast a quick frightened look at her brother. He was standing with his back to her. Lindsay had self-command enough to read on to the end of the brief note, and then stole to Ninian's side. He turned round.

"Come, sister, give me the letters, and then go and make your preparations. We have very little time before we start."

"Wait, just one minute." She showed him the envelope of the letter, which was in Mr. Ulverston's handwriting. There was a note inside, not from him but from Hope. "It gives news — sudden news."

Ninian turned ghastly pale — he grasped the chair convulsively. "What is it? — Tell me!"

Lindsay was silent — only coming nearer and clinging to him.

"Tell me," he repeated, almost inaudibly.

"Two days ago, suddenly — by Ulverston's persuasions and her father's — Hope was — *married!*"

Ninian remained a moment where he stood — upright, motionless — then he tried to move and walk to the door, but staggered as he went. Lindsay followed.

"No sister — good kind sister — no!"

She obeyed, and he passed from her sight to bear that awful grief — as only it could be borne — alone.

CHAPTER VII.

NINIAN and his sister were living at The Gowans, they two alone together. They had lived so for more than a year. Over that year let a veil fall; to uplift it could do no good to any human being.

In our youth, we sigh, and say with the poet,

"Love's pain is very sweet."

We linger with a charmed interest indescribable over stories of much enduring, disappointed, or hopeless affection. But as every one of us — man or woman — is born to suffer, and most of us, in some way or other, to suffer love, we all either have come, or shall come in time, to know the things we once only dreamed of. The truth of these things lies not with the weepers and wailers, the melancholy poets, the pathetic delineators of woe — foolish nightingales that go and press their breast against a thorn, that they may have the pleasure of singing over it. Sometimes this same truth — for it is a truth, though, like many others, frequently garbled into an easy jest, or a beautiful lie — is preached by a dumb life-history; ruined health, heart-nobleness tainted, sympathies crushed, temper soured; and for such shortcomings man has no charity, nor woman either! Or perhaps this awful verity is indicated by some outward show of calamity, and we are forced to see that Heaven was merciful in sending to the broken-hearted a quiet early death, or the oblivion of a harmless and moonstruck melancholy, to heal over what otherwise never could be healed on earth.

But beyond all these traits — which appertain only to the many who were born without strength enough to resist or endure — is a deeper truth still. You may read it on the title-page of this book.

"[illegible]"

It was the motto of Norman Greene's whole life; but especially of that one year which we shall leave unrecorded. Its history Norman himself never told to living creature, neither then nor at any future time. But many years afterwards Dinah clung to one very dear to her the sole record of what her brother had passed through. It was a verse — the only verse marked in his Bible — for Mr. Greene was not one of those self-important pietists who score their own petty approvals or experiences upon every chapter of the Word of Life. This text was only indicated by a faint line, and the date of the year:

"*When I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.*"

And as, on this day after the year's closing, he sat reading in the lamplight, his faithful elder sister working opposite, there was in his appearance something which furnished a fit comment on these words. He looked like a man who had traversed "the valley of the shadow of death," and therein had been "comforted."

He was much changed — seemed a good deal older — nor could there now be any doubt about the fact, which Dinie always contested to the very death — that her brother was growing grey. But some people look far handsomer in age than they ever do in youth; the hard lines soften down, the restless expression wears away, and the inward beauty of spirit deepening more

and more, becomes independent of mere external form. There was no doubt that at fifty Ninian Græme would be a very fine-looking man.

"How quiet the house seems, Lindsay."

"Yes, very;" and, as he laid down his book, his sister laid down her work, ready to talk if he were so inclined. "I think we feel the difference, after Ruth and Esther and their babies being here all day. You are quite sure you did not mind it, brother, — the noise I mean?"

"Oh, no; they did not cry more than babies generally do, and those two girls were so pleased and proud to bring them. We must be considerate, Lindsay. It is a grand thing to be uncle and aunt, you know."

So said he, with a cheerful smile, and sank his book again. He was the same Ninian, leaning in the same arm-chair, with the old pet cat on his knee. There was no change in the room, — the merry parlour once so resonant with voices; — no change, except in its perfect silence.

The brother and sister — very like one another always, and growing liker every day — sat thus, as they sat night after night keeping quiet vigil together, old bachelor and old maid.

"Have you not read enough? You look tired," said Miss Græme, after a long pause, during which she had watched how Ninian's eyes, though still fixed upon the book, grew blank and dull, as if he were studying a harder page than that which lay opened before him. Otherwise, his attentive sister would never have ventured the interruption.

He started slightly, and closed the book.

"I believe I am rather sleepy. Is it late? I almost wish it were bedtime."

Very sad it is to hear any one in health say this; with that weary look too, indicating worse than mere bodily exhaustion. The unconscious longing for rest always seems to imply a deeper longing still — for that repose which closes the world's perpetual strife.

"It is only ten o'clock. But just as you like, brother. I can shut up the house at once; still, if you are not tired, I should like to talk to you a little."

"Talk then. Truly, my silent sister can be quite loquacious and entertaining, as I found out when I was ill," said Mr. Græme, with an affectionate look.

Lindsay smiled, and then became serious. "I wanted you to read this letter, which Esther had from Tinie yesterday. We thought it would be as well to show it to you."

He took it. "Really Tinie's hand-writing is getting more careless than ever. A nice scrawl she must make of the poor Professor's papers. I cannot make out anything clearly, except 'Christina Reay,' with the grand flourish, and the queer sketches of heads below. The lassie is as daft as ever."

He said this with a touching attempt at his old cheerfulness, and began to decipher the illegible hieroglyphics. Sometimes they made him smile, especially a comical imaginary sketch of Esther's baby, doubtless as amusing to the young mother as it was to the uncle, who was trying hard to feel on these topics a proper avuncular interest. But, as he went on, he began to look grave.

"Who is this Mrs. Armadale whom Edmund is always going to see, and about whom Tinie seems so vexed?"

"I believe she is one of the actresses at the — Theatre; and Edmund said something about her influence

having been of advantage to his play, which is accepted there. But the boy writes me such short letters now, and so seldom," added Lindsay, sighing.

Ninian continued to read. "I think," he said, pausing, "that Tinie should have told us these things before, or else have tried by her own means to influence her brother. Instead of which, she seems only to scold him. Edmund will never bear that, I know."

Lindsay looked alarmed. "You do not think he is seriously going wrong? He was always fond of amusement; every boy is. The theatre is a great treat to him, as he told me; but he said there was no harm in it; none at all. And what is this place which Tinie calls a Casino? I never heard of it before."

"I have. It is not such a very awful place, so do not look terrified, Lindsay. It is just a room where young men go to dance, and hear singing. Still, Edmund might do better than waste his evenings there. I will write and tell him so."

(Perhaps if young Edmund had been hidden behind the door, he would have laughed heartily at the simplicity of his old-fashioned Scottish brother and sister, and plumed himself upon knowing so much more of the world than they.)

"It is not good news of the boy, on the whole. I must look after him a little more, now that I am stronger," said Ninian. "But the letter does not end here. You have not given me the whole of it."

"There is one page more. You can read it if you like; but —" Lindsay hesitated, with an anxious glance towards her brother. He drew back his hand a moment, and then, shading his eyes, said, in a low voice.

"Read it aloud, Lindsay — every word, mind."

It was a serio-comic description of the young wife's happy life, day by day, including a hearty wish that everybody had as good a husband as Kenneth Reay.

"'I wonder if Hope has, by-the-by?'" continued the paragraph. "'She does not often speak of him in her letters. I had one the other day, dated at Florence, where they will stay another year. She says she wonders you do not write, and is afraid you were not pleased at her marrying so hastily, but that there were reasons. Very likely! How could she help it, poor child? That Mr. Ulverston could almost wile a bird off a bush, as *I* know. I often make Kenneth jealous of him, though, by talking of old times. Heigho! who would have thought that Desdichado would have married quiet little Hope, and I should have taken up with my poor old Professor? Still, I wouldn't like to change.'"

All this Ninian listened to without stirring, except a convulsive movement of the fingers of his left hand, which made his old favourite on his knee turn round and purr. He paused, and stroked it, — poor fellow! he could not afford to reject even a dumb animal's love.

There was a silence. Afterwards Mr. Græme said, slowly, "Lindsay, write to her. She will feel hurt else." — This was the only comment he made.

Very soon he recurred to the subject of Edmund's wild ways, about which he was evidently more anxious than he liked to show. So was Lindsay. They talked the matter over for some time. At last the elder sister said, timidly,

"You must judge best. Still, if we could persuade Edmund to come home, or if you would not mind going to see him in London —"

Ninian started nervously. "I cannot, sister — I

cannot! Do not ask me." But on reflection his mind seemed to waver. He sat long in a thoughtful mood, and then, just as they were going to bed, said, cheerfully, "Lindsay, be content; I will go and see after your boy. To-morrow — no! the day after, I will start for London."

Mr. Græme's making up his mind never cost any one any trouble. There were no more discussions, but at the time specified he was on his way to the metropolis.

London on a bright May-day, the streets full of cabs, carriages, and gay pedestrians; visions of "Jack-in-the green" appearing at stray corners; long lines of posted play-bills, showing that all the amusements of the season have begun; Regent-street pavements glimmering almost clean enough for white satin shoes, and the Duke of York on his column, standing vividly out against a sky as blue as that of Canaletto's "Venice" — such was the phantasmagorial picture which greeted Ninian Græme.

He did not look a fit adjunct to its pleasurable brightness. He had a tired, dull look, such as he rarely wore when Lindsay was watching him at The Gowans. He invariably left it behind him at his office, lest it should trouble the quiet of a heart which now had little other thought or care than himself in the whole wide world.

Some vague feeling made him unwilling that his own kindred should see him in this jaded, melancholy condition; so he went to an inn, and after a few hours' rest proceeded to his sister's house.

"There awa', ane and a'; there's naebody here," was the doleful response of Katie, the Græmes' old servant, who had been kindly transferred from the elder sister to the younger ("an' muckle need o't," as the staid

handmaiden, once declared, eying her inexperienced girlish mistress). "They're awa' to a tea-drinking, and Master Edmund's gane to see some play-acting — some new fule's doings o' his ain — o' the whilk I dinna ken nor care."

And she pursed up her lips with an indication of high disapproval, scarcely modified by her delight at seeing her old master.

"Ye're unco' welcome, Mr. Ninian," said she, when she had settled him in the parlour. "Wae's me! There's ne'er a ane o' your father's sons that will grow up the like o' yoursel'!"

"Why do you say that, Katie?"

"It's nae business o' mine; but I'm aye glad ye're come, sir. It gies ane a sair heart to see young laddies gaun a' wrang for want o' a bridle i' their mou', and a father or a brither to haud it fast."

"That means, poor Edmund?".

"Eh, sir — but I wadna like to bring the laddie into trouble."

"Of course not. Still, if I knew all —"

"I canna tell ye then — nor the half o't. But when laddies gang abroad a' the day, and amaist a' the nicht, naebody kens whar; comin' hame in the wee hours, ane, twa, three, or maybe no comin' ava; — — it's awfu' wark! An' him that was a wee toddling bairn at my knee no twenty year sin syne!"

The old Scotswoman shook her head, half in sternness, half in sorrow. Ninian asked no more questions; he felt a reluctance to finding out by stealth his brother's errors. And besides, there was a vague self-reproach troubling him, as if he himself were to blame for those many months when he had been forced to sit in dull *repose* by the fireside at The Gowans, and let the world

and its affairs, even those pertaining to his near kindred, go by like shadows.

Many have known such a time — when all feeling seemed paralysed, except for the ordinary mechanical round of life. But few, at their waking out of it, have experienced the compunction of this good man; whose existence had previously been so filled with manifold duties, that even their partial cessation seemed to him a crime.

"I ought to have taken more care over the lad," thought the elder brother, as he reflected on the many stories which had reached him of the young prodigal. Then learning from Katie that the family would not be home for some hours, and that this was the first night of Edmund's play — his maiden work, of which he had not told them at The Gowans — Mr. Græme set off to the theatre.

It was one of those entitled "minor," but elevated by the lingerings of the legitimate drama. The scene was a goodly one — such as old Shakspeare might have taken pleasure in. Ninian had some difficulty in making his way through the crowd of intelligent, critical play-goers — none very aristocratic, but belonging to that honest, life-abounding mass, "the people." Tradesmen, with their wives and daughters; brisk, sensible young fellows, who struggled after information from behind counters and on office-stools; solemn city worthies, and respectable mechanics; with a sprinkling here and there of appreciators of the drama of a higher intellectual grade — these constituted the audience.

And a capital audience they were — warm, earnest, and receptive, to a remarkable degree. Mr. Græme, unused to theatre-going, had not been ten minutes in the house before he felt interested in them, and with them.

He was alone too, for he could not see his brother anywhere. He almost thought he had made some error, for the play in the bill was marked as being by a "celebrated author;" and he never imagined his boy Edmund to be anything of the kind.

However, he resolved to stay where he was, and await the end of the performance.

There are few more pleasurable excitements than that attending the first night of a new play — well acted, with a good-natured, appreciative audience. Even if Ninian had had no fraternal stake in the matter, he would have entered warmly into the interest of the night. He saw, likewise, what at last convinced him that the "celebrated author" must, in some metaphorical sense, be meant to indicate Edmund; since the heroine of the play, as marked on the bills, was Mrs. Armadale — the object of Tinie's alarm and indignation. He looked with some curiosity to her entrance on the stage.

At last there was a round of welcome applause; the heroine had appeared.

She was a grand-looking woman, stately and tall. Her robes, of mediæval fashion, were worn with a most regal air; and there was a fierce, restless glitter in her eyes, which exactly suited the half-barbaric princess of Edmund's play. When she spoke, her voice gave Ninian a start. It was one of the finest of stage-voices — deep and full, her elocution and accent perfect; though now and then a quick ear might detect a slight northern tone — a broadening or softening of vowels.

"That is Mrs. Armadale?" said he, inquiringly of his next neighbour, who was gazing dumb with admiration — being a youth of that age when all fine actresses appear divinities.

"Yes, it's her. Isn't she a stunner? Ah!"

Ninian felt inclined to smile; but soon his own attention was fixed, with a deeper interest than that of the stage.

The mediæval princess had a part of great passion — love, of course, being the moving agent therein. In the first act, she maintained her frigid dignity; in the second, she came down step by step from that icy height, and melted into a torrent of passion; in the third she had to enact a woman scorned. Then burst out the full powers of this young actress — for she was still young. Her delineation, though sometimes crude and abrupt — wanting the refinement of experience — was a piece of natural painting, marvellous in energy, and vivid as life itself.

The house grew still as death. Even Ninian drew in his breath, fascinated by something familiar in the voice, though the disguise effected by stage costume and high tragedy aspect bewildered him completely as to the person of the heroine. But when at last, in a climax of despair, the poor princess dashed the crown from her head, and rushed to the front of the stage, the footlights shining distinctly on her face — that face of a dead pallor, with the wavy auburn locks falling about it all unbound — Of a sudden, the truth flashed upon Ninian Græme.

The young actress was Rachel Armstrong.

This then explained all: the anonymous gifts sent to John Forsyth! the mystery of Edmund's association with Mrs. Armadale. The youth had kept her secret well, whatever had been his motive for so doing. Perhaps — and a painful misgiving crossed the brother's mind — perhaps the "wronged sinner" had now become a sinner indeed — or worse, a temptress.

It was a bitter, probably an unjust thought; but Mr. Græme was a Scotsman, not quite free from the almost universal Scottish prejudice against "play-actors." For the moment, he felt as if he would rather have found Rachel Armstrong toiling in the meanest hut, than a successful actress on the stage.

The third act ended; the audience began to emerge from behind their pocket-handkerchiefs and talk of the play. Many comments reached Ninian, pleasant enough to his brotherly ears; but he had now another interest equal to that of Edmund. He listened eagerly to what was said of Mrs. Armadale.

"She's a grand actress. Her genius wants a little form — art — cultivation, and then — she'll beat old Siddons hollow," said a young England critic, a puller down of the ancient traditions of the stage.

"She's a fine woman, too," added a sallow-looking young fellow, something between a man of fashion and a green-room *habitué*. "Quite as handsome off the stage as on — only so confoundedly frosty. Did you hear how she treated Sir Arthur B—?"

The two began to laugh together — that bitter, under-toned laugh, that comes like an ice-breath across a woman's face. Ninian felt his blood boil as he listened.

There was a young girl in the box — probably sister to one of these — an innocent-looking creature, behind whose back they were talking. She turned with red eyes, and sighed out, "How nice it was to cry over a play, and how naturally that beautiful Mrs. Armadale acted, just as if she felt it all. What a pity it was only acting!"

Ninian listened to these idle comments on the sham

tragedy, and then thought of the real tragedy of the woman's life. How strange these things were!

When again Rachel appeared, her mien brightened by the supposed gleam of hope, which according to due dramatic recipe, Edmund had given in the fourth act of his tragedy; when she moved beneath the glare of theatrical show, mimicking — not sorrow — that had been no mimicry! — but happiness, — Ninian closed his eyes with a sense of indescribable repulsion. He wished she had become a poverty-stricken drudge, a melancholy mourner — anything but an actress.

But as the play went on, the woman's genius drew him out of himself once more. Fate darkened again over the poor barbaric princess. Well had the young dramatist sketched her, and nobly did the actress vivify his conception. She grew once more magnificent — inspired — sublime! She wielded the power which a great tragedian can wield over the highest moral consciousness and most refined emotions of the soul.

Whatever the individual man may be, mankind when assembled in masses is always alive to the highest ideal of human virtue. In the drama especially — that is, the heroic drama, the noblest form of theatrical representation — this instinct never fails. The thronged house was hushed to silence, thrilled with awe, melted into pity. Many women were in tears — nay, here and there, some sturdy man was seen with quivering features, half-yielding to, half-fighting against, the strong emotion. Young and old, rich and poor, ignorant and refined, were subdued, as if they had but one heart, and this woman held it in her hand.

The curtain fell upon a last scene, to which the genius of the actress had lent a superhuman beauty that

seemed almost the transfiguration of death. The mimic life-history was ended.

Ninian woke as out of a trance. On his mind, fresh and unused to such impressions, the effect was overpowering. Touch by touch, all the deepest wells of his spirit had been stirred into motion — not merely by compelled sympathy for what was piteous or beautiful, but by the touched chords of many an individual feeling, which was his daily care to deaden, yet which the excitement of the drama had caused to quiver one by one into painful life. Over all fell the calm which belongs to that sphere whither the great poet and actor can together lift us, when even sorrow becomes serene, and death itself appears sublimated into inexpressible peace.

So Ninian felt. When, after one hushed pause, the house burst into thunders of acclamation, — with a long, deep sigh, he threw off the enchantment. But his mind had somewhat changed — he no longer so deeply lamented over Rachel and her calling. To be an actress — and such an actress — was not altogether an unworthy destiny.

The storm of applause increased apace, mingled with various calls and exclamations perfectly unintelligible to an unpractised ear. Then all the sea of faces bent one way, and Mr. Græme, looking thitherwards, saw bowing from a private box, that favourite of an audience for one night only — the Author!

A thrill passed through the brotherly heart of a silent unit in that shouting crowd. It was Edmund — his boy Edmund!

As soon as he could, the elder brother made his way *to the* box. It was filled with various men of note —

laughing, talking, and congratulating. In the midst of the circle stood the young author.

He had been a mere stripling a year ago, and though now twenty-one, looked a stripling still, — except his face, which was very haggard and old. His eyes, sometimes gleaming with genius, then glittering with excitement, his mouth, trembling at every breath of feeling, were the sole traces left of that innocent boyish face which Lindsay had thought so fair.

For a minute or two, Ninian, being kept outside, listened to the young author, who was talking loudly — the very centre of the group, until appeared his elder brother.

Edmund started — grew pale — confused. What could there be in Ninian to alarm him so? It was an evidently unpleasant surprise. But Mr. Græme was too happy himself to notice this.

"You did not expect to see me here, my dear boy? It was a mere chance that I came to London to-day. But I am so glad — and so proud, Edmund."

He grasped the hand — now offered to him almost as to a stranger; the same hand by which he had once led his favourite brother, the wee toddling fellow that he taught to walk!

The circle in the box, second-rate authors, actors, wits about town, looked with curious, half-sarcastic eyes on the stranger who had so thoroughly damped young Græme's flow of spirits.

"My brother, gentlemen," said Edmund, colouring painfully. "My elder brother from Scotland."

Ninian bowed, glanced quickly over the young man's associates — thought in his own mind that they were a queer dissipated looking set — and assuming what was

certainly his right, began to talk to his brother, the "celebrated author."

"How long have you grown so renowned, Edmund? Why did you keep all this from me?"

"I thought probably you would take no interest in the matter."

"You were mistaken, you see." Ninian said no more, for he was hurt. He began speaking of the play in a simple, homely style, which sounded ludicrously different from the stage-familiar cant which play-going critics use. Edmund looked half-ashamed — his companions turned aside to smile. One by one they dropped away with a nod and hint at a rendez-vous which signal Edmund answered as mysteriously.

When they were gone, the youth seemed more at ease; and asked, for the first time, after Lindsay and his other sisters.

"They are all well. They will be so proud of your success, my boy! We always said you would be the genius of the family."

Edmund's eyes faintly gleamed once more, and then his long-sustained excitement having at last burned itself out, he sat down at the back of the box, quite exhausted.

Ninian put his hand on his young brother's shoulder in the old familiar way. "You do not look well. You are not taking care of yourself, Edmund."

"Oh yes, as much as I can, with the life I lead;" and the real sense of weariness he felt was mingled with a slightly affected "used-up" air, such as young people often delight in.

"Do you like that life? Are you really happy, my boy?"

Edmund looked up, and his young face darkened into bitterness — bitterness that was quite real. "Happy! Pshaw — an adjectice belonging to the language of Arcadia, which is — a dead language now. Nobody is ever happy. But I'm very merry, which is enough."

He laughed out loud and changed the conversation. "This is a nice little theatre, brother. Plays well got up — well acted. Ah!" and a sudden thought appeared to strike him, "how did you like Mrs. Armadale? She is a woman of great genius."

"I always *knew* she was," answered Ninian, pointedly.

"Knew! She — is she not — a stranger."

"Why should you be playing with me, Edmund?" returned Ninian, gravely. "Do you think I could not see at once who this young actress is? Why did you not tell me long before?"

"Because she bade me not."

"Wherefore! She need not have been afraid of me — poor Rachel Armstrong!"

"Hush! nobody knows — nobody dreams that such is her name. That is, no one but me. She told me the whole story — all but his name, — I wish I knew it! Curse him!"

"What could have been her reason in telling you this, you — a mere boy?"

Edmund's sallow cheek grew scarlet. "I do not see, brother, that you have any right to —"

He was stopped by a knock at the box-door. A lady stood there. The elder brother might have known, by the sudden changing of Edmund's look — who it was. He turned half aside, lest he might startle Rachel.

She came into the box. Her stage-dress was of course put off. She had on a close black gown, with a

black veil thrown over her head. The paint removed, her features had a death-like whiteness and stillness.

"You did not come round to me, so I thought I would come to you. I congratulate you, Edmund," said she, in cold clear tones.

"Thanks! Forgive me for not coming to thank *you*, through whom alone I have won this triumph," murmured the young man, with a gesture as if he were about to kiss her hand; but either the recollection of his brother's presence, or some slight repellant action of Rachel herself, prevented him.

"It has been a great success — all in the theatre say so. But we will talk it over another time. You are engaged now, I see."

She was retiring, when Ninian came forward with extended hand.

"Rachel!"

A start — a quiver — but only momentary. Her whole mien, face, and voice indicated the change that had passed over her, utterly withering up her heart. There was not life enough left in it to suffer pain.

Rachel drew herself up, looked right forward with those wonderful eyes, clear and deep as ever, but cold, like a frozen spring. She said, with scarce a change in her passionless voice, "This is unexpected. But I am very glad to see you, Mr. Græme."

Ninian was perfectly confounded. Whether she had entirely overcome, forgotten, or desired to ignore the past, he could not tell. One thing was evident from her manner, that she wished him in meeting her to recognise only the actress Mrs. Armadale. Why she had assumed that name he never inquired, nor did she ever explain.

"It was a beautiful play, was it not?" she added,

breaking the pause. "You may well be proud of Edmund." (She did not call him Geoffrey now.) "I must congratulate you both, and then say adieu, for my maid is waiting."

And through the half-opened door was seen the withered face and crooked figure of old Jane Sedley.

"Shall we not see you to-night?" whispered Edmund, anxiously. "Ah, you could not be so cruel!"

She paused a little, but afterwards said, "I will come."

Then, with the same perfectly self-possessed manner — cold, not positively, but negatively, from the utter absence of anything like feeling or warmth — the young actress left the box.

"Is she always thus?" asked Ninian, in a low tone.

"Always — except when she is acting."

"Poor soul!" Neither of the two brothers made any other remark. Both felt that the silence her demeanour imposed must not be broken, even between themselves.

Likewise, from Edmund's unconscious betrayals, Ninian began to guess at a secret which made him still more careful how he mentioned the name of Mrs. Armadale to his young brother. — The thing was improbable; yet it might be. What if all Edmund's light, poetical loves were settling into one serious passion? Wrung with pity and pain, the elder brother turned to look at him.

He was evidently in strong but pleasurable excitement. Smiling, he stood and beat time to the orchestra, who were strumming away at some merry waltzes, prior to the second piece.

"You will stay for the farce, I suppose, brother?" said he, looking as if he heartily wished Ninian would

do so. "For me — I hate after-pieces; we regular play-goers always do. Besides, I have an engagement."

"What is it?" asked Mr. Græme. He thought he certainly might put that simple question to his younger brother.

But Edmund did not seem to relish it. "Really, it cannot interest you. A little harmless amusement, that is all."

"Come — surely I am not growing an old ogre to you, my boy," said Ninian, good-naturedly. "Tell me."

"Nothing worth telling. Everybody does it, after a successful play. Just a little sort of supper to actors and actresses — pleasant enough — but still, not what you would care for."

"We don't know that. Let me try. Among all your guests you'll not shut out your brother?"

There was no resisting Ninian's frank, kindly ways; Edmund, with the best grace he could, took his arm, and with him quitted the box.

CHAPTER VIII.

It may speak very ill for Mr. Græme's knowledge of the world, to confess that until this night he had never been "behind the scenes" of a theatre. He was a good deal amused to observe this strange region of odd contrasts and explained illusions. The green-room, with its lounging throng of people in all sorts of costumes, was not uninteresting to his simple mind, which, unused to the dark side of theatrical life, viewed all things in their best light. He noticed how perfectly *au fait* young Edmund seemed in all the mysteries of the place — how he exchanged greetings with actors apparently of every grade, and indulged in gay and not too respectful badinage with many a fair painted *comédienne*. Ninian was really astonished to find what a popular, brilliant, and self-assured young dandy Edmund had turned out.

He seemed merry, too — like a person ever ready to lose himself in the enchantment of the moment, which, indeed, had been the boy's characteristic always. There was no detecting that restless, uneasy look, except once, when Ninian heard him ask with apparent carelessness, "If Mrs. Armadale had gone?"

"Some time since," answered a young man, whom Mr. Græme recognised as his neighbour during the play, who had so emphatically decided the question of Rachel's charms "off the stage," "I offered to escort her, but was met by that crusty, hump-backed little dragon of the Hesperides, and so! — Bah! It really was not worth

while to urge. However, we shall see her at your supper to-night, Græme?"

Edmund, catching his brother's eye, looked uncomfortable.

"Who is he with whom you were talking?" said Ninian.

"Mr. Lyonell — a rich young merchant, and a Jew; though he is rather ashamed than otherwise of Father Abraham."

So, with a quick, sarcastic comment upon almost every one they met, concerning whom the elder brother had a very justifiable curiosity, this young man, so worldly wise and withal so bitter, led Ninian through the mazes of the theatre. Perhaps, his first instinctive confusion being gone, Edmund even took a pleasure in exhibiting how much he had eaten of the tree of knowledge, and how deeply he had become acquainted with what parents and guardians frowningly consider "the wickedness of the world."

Of course, it was impossible for young Græme's little festival to be holden at his own home in his brother-in-law's house; so it "came off" at Mr. Lyonell's. But still, as all seemed to know — Edmund was the host and giver of this very handsome "champagne supper."

— It was rather peculiar certainly, the brother thought. His own moderate allowance to Edmund would certainly not admit of such festivities. However, he made no remark, but determined to conduct himself in every way as a mere guest, and not a watchful censor of the youth's manners and customs.

The guests assembled; in number about a dozen men, with a light sprinkling of ladies. At first, the master of the feast looked rather awkward, especially in intro-

ducing his fair friends, to whom Ninian bowed with the grave politeness with which he ever treated all women, — a deference, however, which the rest of the company did not imitate, but evidently considered the genus actress as a creation of lower order.

"I wonder, will the Armadale come?" observed Mr. Lyonell. "You're a lucky fellow, Græme, to get her to indulge us with the light of her countenance. She never did such a thing in her life before."

This was well, Ninian thought. He had begun to doubt whether this fair-seeming company was exactly what it seemed. Though most of them, men and women, were known to him by name, and he knew nothing evil of them, still there was a certain *laissez-faire* in their talk, a bandying about of theatrical jests and theatrical scandal, which jarred painfully on Ninian's mind, and brought him down from that calm ideal height on which Rachel's acting had placed him. He found that the theatre was but the theatre after all; — a place where if not impossible — and a few actresses, good and pure women, maidens, wives, mothers; a few actors, honest, virtuous, honourable men, have proved and do prove that it is *not* impossible — it is at least very difficult, to "touch pitch and not be defiled."

He began to wish that Mrs. Armadale would not come, but scarcely had he done so than she appeared, followed by her faithful little "dragon."

If Rachel had meant to draw the line between tragedy and comedy, she could not better have done so than by the contrast her own appearance formed to the other ladies. She was still in her high, black dress, plain even to severity. She had no jewels — not one; but when she took off her glove, Ninian saw there was still on her

left hand her mother's guard, which to herself had been made the piteous mockery of a wedding-ring.

The other guests received with a sort of compelled respect the chief guest of the evening, the successful tragic actress. She bowed to them all, and shook hands with a few, especially with Edmund, to whom her manner had a marked but dignified kindness. Ninian thought that she could not, or would not, see what he, alas! saw too plainly — the infatuated passion which was either dawning, or struggling through crushèd hopelessness, in the breast of the young man.

However, Edmund was too thoroughly world-taught to betray himself much; he soon recovered his self-possession, and the supper began. Mrs. Armadale's entrance had unconsciously given a different tone to the conversation, which was now resumed with new zest. The small jesters and scandal-mongers felt their energies flag, while the keen wits and brilliant critics recovered their better selves for a while. Then Ninian, sitting rather silent and retired, had an opportunity of observing into what Rachel Armstrong had developed.

— A woman of intellect strong and clear, sometimes even sparkling, but with a frosty glitter in which there was no warmth; who talked a good deal, and talked well, though chiefly on her own profession in its higher sense. In her manner was little assumed haughtiness, and no positive reserve, but a kind of passionless reticence, which enshrined her as it were in an atmosphere too rare for any intruder therein to breathe. No fear of stain on the marble, simply because it *was* marble.

Ninian watched her — the centre of attraction to a circle of admiring men about town and brilliant, easy-principled men of letters; controlling the one set by a

few occasional words, keen enough, though scarcely condescending to sarcasm; meeting the others upon their own ground — that of pure intellect — and in conversation showing powers of almost masculine vigour, combined with a susceptibility to everything beautiful which could be received and appreciated by the mind alone. But the heart was utterly dead.

Yet there she was, beautiful, admired, and conscious of admiration. Ninian thought of the woman whom he had seen, not quite three years ago, creeping staggeringly into his dark office at midnight, to receive her doom. Did she remember it? He spoke to her little, nor she to him, but more than once he caught her eye. It was expressionless.

By degrees the supper grew into what a champagne-supper after the play was not unlikely to degenerate. Men talked — rather too loudly. Women laughed — more lightly than women ought to laugh. Ninian Græme saw his brother — the boy so tenderly and fondly reared — the loudest talker and the gayest laugher; sitting with cheek flushed and eyes sparkling, a victim to orgies, which, though not yet obscuring his faculties, perhaps even brightening his genius, were in a man so young the warning of after ruin.

Did Rachel see all this? She did not, so far as Mr. Græme could discern. She sat, testifying neither repulsion nor shame; a little more silent perhaps, but that was all. Some of the men she had been talking with seceded, and Ninian was able to get nearer to her. He thought he would venture to speak, mingling a little of his old friendliness with the distance she apparently wished to preserve between them.

"Mrs. Armadale!"

She turned — a slight contracting of her brows alone showing that she remembered her questioner was Ninian Græme. "I beg your pardon. Did you speak to me?"

"You look wearied, and it is late. Can I be of any assistance in seeing you home?"

"Thank you, no! My hours are always late." Some time longer she sat, until at last even Ninian wondered at her stay.

"Do you like this society?" said he, trying if possible to arouse her to some sense of her position.

"It is amusing; it passes time away," she answered, coldly.

"But surely to see clever men — wise men — men of genius, thus forgetting the dignity of their calling, and becoming mere buffoons."

"It is their own affair; it matters not to me."

More and more silent, the young actress sat by Mr. Græme, until his manly spirit almost recoiled to know a woman was beside him in such a company. He thought he would make one last attempt to recover the influence he once possessed over her.

"Pardon me; but indeed, Rachel —"

A slight shiver passed over her. "Say *Mrs. Armadale.*"

"I understand. Forgive me, when I tell you how much it pains me that you should remain here. Will you let me call a carriage?"

"As you choose; or let my maid do it." Still Rachel made no attempt to move.

"Excuse me, but you must go. It is right you should;" and the clear eye which had controlled her even in the days of her temporary madness was fixed kindly *but firmly* on her now.

Rachel moved restlessly, as if it brought back some touch of old feelings to her poor frozen heart. "You are very good, Mr. Græme, I will go." She took his offered arm and rose.

But the tide of gaiety was now running too high to allow even of due respect to Mrs. Armadale herself. The young gallants of the party declared that it was impossible the light of the meeting could be suffered to eclipse herself so soon. And when Ninian, having quietly made arrangements for her departure, came to fetch her away, he found his intent marred by Lyonell and one or two others, who proceeded with boisterous mirth to intercept the lady's retreat.

Ninian, unwilling to come to an open contention, tried to open the door, but in vain. He turned to his brother.

"Edmund, it is your place, not mine, to interfere here. You surely will remonstrate with your friends?"

Edmund tried reasoning as well as he could with his half-fumed brain; directing meanwhile imploring looks at Mrs. Armadale, who stood passive, though her heavy brows darkened in a slight frown.

"It will not do, gentlemen," interposed Mr. Græme, at last. "I myself must desire you to release this lady — if my brother has so far forgotten all courtesy and kind feeling towards her."

"It is not his fault — Poor boy! poor boy!" said Rachel, as she looked at Edmund, who seemed struggling against his bewilderment and trying vainly to control the alarm he felt at missing his beautiful idol.

Rachel went up to him with a commanding, yet kindly air. "Edmund, good night. Go home at once with your brother — mind, I say, go home."

The youth muttered some reply, kissing her hand with a maudlin chivalric air. But Rachel abruptly drew it away, and advanced to the door.

"Allow *me* to speak," she said to Ninian. And then motioning the young men aside with a gesture that was neither haughty nor contemptuous but thoroughly unconcerned and indifferent, she added: "Mr. Lyonell, you will be kind enough to let me pass — Mr. Barker and Mr. White —, I wish you good evening."

Way was made at once: Rachel unlocked the door and went out, Mr. Græme following. Ere long, while the two yet stood in the ante-room, they heard a chorus of laughter, and one or two loud spoken jests — which caused Ninian to feel the colour flushing in his cheek.

"Rachel!" said he in his earnestness, forgetting her prohibition, "forgive an old friend's plainness. Tell me, why did you come here?"

"Edmund asked me. I wished not to be unkind to the boy."

Ninian glanced sharply at her, but there was no change in Rachel's manner to indicate that she believed Edmund felt towards her in any way but as a "boy." — "That was kind of you, but very thoughtless of my brother. I entreat you, be more careful in future. Forgive my bluntness, but you know we are old friends."

"Are we? Yes, I owe you much kindness." But even this acknowledgment of the past was made with the same expressionless demeanour.

"Then, may I come and see you?"

"To-morrow, if you will."

"Thank you, and I hope we shall not meet *here* again. There may be no harm in this society, but I think a woman cannot be too careful of her dignity, her reputation."

"You know well I have none, to lose."

In these words, slow and cold, evincing the calm of utter despair, was the key to the woman's whole present life.

They so overwhelmed Ninian that he could find no answer. Thoroughly subdued with pity, he led Rachel out into the street, where he had a carriage waiting.

"I think," said he pausing with kindly tact — "I will say good night now. It is better for you to go home alone."

"Jane is with me." And there appeared a little dark figure — the sole protection this desolate young creature had.

"Mrs. Sedley, you remember me?" whispered Ninian, as the old woman looked suspiciously at him, but on the recognition, uttered his name with a cry of pleasure and thankfulness. He lifted her into the carriage; he could not have done so with more respect had the poor servant been the greatest lady in the land — and sent them both home.

Mr. Græme stayed and took a turn or two up the solitary street, considering whether or not he should return to the party. Anxiety for his brother and some lurking feeling that even on Mrs. Armadale's account it would be better for him to reappear, decided him.

Therefore for two more hours he endured what to a man of his temperament and delicate health — for he was not so strong as he had been — were, to say the least, two hours of downright martyrdom. At dawn the assembly broke up; the young host being left in a state of wild excitement that cut his brother to the heart.

The waiter came up — there was evidently a bill to be paid, even though the supper was held in Mr. Lyonell's house. The young giver of the feast looked aghast.

"Edmund — the man is waiting. Have you the money?"

"I had it — I think — but, by Jove! it has somehow melted away. And now, I remember, White plagued me about that small debt of honour. Upon my life, waiter, I haven't a farthing, or indeed it would give me the greatest satisfaction — delight — ecstatic felicity, as Lyonell says — where has he gone to? — comical fellow that Lyonell!"

Thus meandered on the unlucky reveller — poor Lindsay's "handsome boy." If she could have seen him now, it would have broken her heart!

Ninian took the bill and paid it; its tolerably large amount ridding him of the last shilling he had about him.

"Now Edmund, come."

"Well, I'm ready. Get a cab," answered Edmund, sulkily.

"No, we must walk home."

And so through the quiet streets and squares already freshening with the morning air, the two brothers went; the younger leaning on the elder, walking sometimes so unsteadily that Ninian had to support him. At such a time remonstrances or reproofs would have been idle; Mr. Græme attempted none. With heart crushed by a shame that seemed to outweigh all sense of personal misery which he had ever known, he led home the boy in whom he had placed so much of tenderness, hope, pride.

"Silence, Katie," whispered he, as the old servant began loudly to rail. "Go to bed: and — say nothing of this. Remember, *I* am here now."

He stayed with Edmund until the luckless youth had fallen into a heavy stupor; then, looking at him as he slept, the elder brother groaned in the anguish of his spirit, and prayed that he might not have come too late *to save* poor Lindsay's boy.

CHAPTER IX.

NINIAN had charged Katie to keep the secret of his arrival; consequently, his appearance at the Professor's breakfast-table had exactly the effect of somebody's "dropping from the clouds." It would have done any one's heart good to hear the scream of delight with which little Mrs. Reay, now a pretty young matron as ever was seen, sprung into her brother's arms.

"Oh, you darling! — oh you nice old fellow! — to come and surprise us thus! Scold him, Kenneth; do scold him, for not coming long ago."

Half-laughing, half-crying, the little woman jumped from husband to brother, indulging the two with a charming oscillation, or perhaps, to improve upon the word, *osculation;* an old propensity of the warm-hearted Tinie, which evidently had not been corrected since her marriage.

At last, having settled down into something like calmness and propriety, Mrs. Reay placed herself at the head of her table, with a comical, sly glance at her brother, as if to say, "Look how very dignified I can be!"

Ninian took his seat beside her, lest her quick eye should read too closely many feelings which the sight of her happiness had stirred from their firmly-guarded repose.

"Well, Kenneth, and how does this wee sister of mine behave herself? Do you wish to send her back?"

"Let him, if he dares!" laughed the young wife. While the Professor — whose outward man was greatly improved, his hair being combed properly, instead of flying all abroad like a hayrick in a high wind, and the rusty brown coat of his bachelor days being exchanged for a most respectable dressing-gown — smiled in full content, while his soft grey eyes twinkled perceptibly.

"Tinie is a very good wife, indeed," said he, his honest cheek blushing like a boy's. "She writes so clearly that I never blunder over my college lectures now. She keeps my eyes so idle that they hardly pain me at all. And she knows how to handle a telescope cleverly. Herschel's sister will be nothing to her, in time."

"There — hold your tongue, Kenneth, or my brother will wonder he never found out all my perfections, and be wishing me back again! Do you, Ninian?" added she, half seriously. "Do you miss me very much?"

"No, Mrs. Vanity — not I!" Then speaking in earnest, "Because I am glad my wee thing is happy — very glad!" And something in his manner ended the pleasant jest.

"We were talking of you but now," said Tinie. "Guess what news is here — all surprises come together, I think."

She held up a foreign letter, superscribed in the hand which Ninian had now taught himself to look at without agitation. "I conclude, it is from Mrs. Ulverston." — He could even say that name now.

"Ay — and only fancy what tidings!" continued the little matron, with a slight blush. "How Esther and Ruth would sympathise if they knew! Their two

infantine angels will be at a discount now. There's one come to Hope likewise."

Ninian moved abruptly and with unsteady step towards the window, through which the morning sun was shining. "It dazzles," he muttered — pulled the blind down and returned to his seat.

"Well, are you not delighted, brother? I am sure Hope is; only read her note — 'tis a very brief one."

He took and read every word: — the bursting forth of a young mother's passionate, proud delight. Then he gave back the letter to his sister.

"Isn't she happy, poor little thing?" Tinie cried.

"God bless her!" said Ninian, in a low voice. This new holiness of motherhood seemed so to surround her, that he felt he *might* bless her with a heart assured that neither in her sight or in the sight of God, was there anything unhallowed in its tenderness.

But he could not talk much; very soon made an excuse to leave the house, and take a quiet walk in the morning air.

Neither the Reays nor himself had made any mention of Edmund. Before Ninian went out, he came and looked at "the boy," as he still fondly called him. Edmund was lying sound asleep; but in his sleep he muttered uneasily something about Rachel.

"I will go and see Rachel," thought Ninian, knowing that to do or think of something for another was the best way to recover the tone of his own mind. He did not know Mrs. Armadale's address; but that was easily attainable at the theatre, so, without much trouble, he found her out.

She was living in homely but decent-looking lodgings, in a quiet street. He hardly knew why, but he was

glad to find her abode so retired and poor. Everything within it was very pretty and neat; and when Mrs. Armadale entered, her appearance was neat likewise. She was not of those queens of the stage who sink into careless slatterns in the morning.

Rachel came in, looking much as she had sometimes done in her most quiet days at Musselburgh — except that her face had lost ten years, as it were, of youth; and her always colourless complexion had settled into an unalterable pallor. She entered from the inner of the two little drawing-rooms, with a manuscript in her hand.

"I am studying my part, you see," said she, when the first greeting was over. "I fancied, in spite of the pleasant thunders of last night, that more might be made of Edmund's 'Princess.' She is a fine sketch of a character, is she not?"

"I thought so; and rendered doubly fine by your acting. You almost made a baby of me," answered Mr. Græme, finding that he must meet her on her own ground, and converse with her only as the actress, Mrs. Armadale.

"I am glad you were pleased," and a cold brightness, the first ray of human feeling he had yet seen there, sparkled in her eyes. "That is what I wish and work for. I care but little for common praise, but I am proud when a man like you comes and tells me I have made him feel thus."

"Are you happy in your profession, then?"

"It gives me constant work, thought, interest, an entire forgetfulness."

A slight lowering of her voice encouraged Ninian ask what he so much longed to know concerning h

life during the early part of those three years which had resulted in her gaining the position which was the first step to future greatness. "Will you tell me why you chose this career, and how you began it?" said he, cautiously putting the question which might probe so bitter a wound.

But she seemed to feel it not, and only replied in her hard manner: "We actresses have no time to think of anything but the present. All you wish to know you can learn of Jane."

Ninian was silenced.

They soon resumed the conversation, chiefly talking about Edmund and his play. Mr. Græme quickly discerned the relation in which Rachel had stood, or intended to have stood, to this youth of genius — having over him the half sisterly, half maternal influence, which a woman can always exercise, and most frequently for good, over a lad much younger than herself. It was evident that the young dramatist's triumph was chiefly owing to her. She had guided him to success, and thereby, from her contempt or ignorance of the world, had placed him in the very midst of its temptations and dangers. While the utter deadness of her own heart made her totally unaware of a deeper ruin in which her kindness was involving him. — It was the old story of an Aspasia, pure and marble-cold, and of a dumb, passionate, desperate Alcibiades.

Ninian, sorely troubled, saw that this enthralment must be ended. But how? He could neither accuse or explain — Rachel gave him no cause for the one, no opportunity of the other. He must only trust to the awakening of Edmund's confidence towards himself, when he, the elder brother, by some resolute means — perhaps

even by drawing the boy's tortured heart to his own, and showing him the scarce-healed wound there — might teach him that it was possible to endure and conquer any passion which becomes unholy and utterly hopeless of fulfilment.

That it was hopeless, and had sprung from nothing but the enthusiasm of a loving-hearted, solitary, and impressible boy, no one who knew Rachel and Edmund could ever for an instant doubt. Mrs. Armadale and Mr. Græme had talked some time, when there came an interruption in the shape of some costumes which had to be tried on.

"I shall turn you out now," said she, "since I would like half an hour's more study for my 'Princess' to-night. I let nothing interfere with work. Indeed, for that reason, I scarcely ever admit visitors."

"Thank you for admitting me."

"There are no thanks needed. It pleases me to welcome one whom I respect, and to whom I am very grateful. Will you come here again in about an hour?"

He promised; and occupied himself during the prescribed time in walking about the quiet streets and squares, musing strangely on all the things which had come to pass since his father died, and since the even current of his life had been troubled with cares of his own and of others, until he feared that it would never sink into its old quiet course again. At the hour fixed, he returned to Mrs. Armadale's door.

Near it, pacing up and down with that discreditable lounge which excites the indignant gossip of all respectable streets, was a gentleman's cab and tiger.

"My mistress desired that when you came you might be shown in here," said Jane Sedley, bringing Mr.

Græme into the small inner drawing-room. "She is engaged just now."

"So it appears," said Ninian, as he instinctively went to close the folding doors, which were a few inches ajar, admitting the clear sound of voices in the adjoining room.

But Jane Sedley prevented him. "Let them stay as they are, sir, I'm sure my mistress would wish it, and I too. She is foolish enough sometimes; and it's a bad set she lives among. But she has lived innocent as a baby. God help her!"

Ninian, with all his world-wisdom, could not divine the reason why he was subjected to this sort of compelled eaves-dropping, a scheme which savoured too much of theatrical device for him much to approve of. It required all his old friendship and deep pity for Rachel to enable him to have any sympathy with her new position and strange wild ways.

Placed as he was, he could not choose but listen to what passed between her and her visitor — a gentleman, or at least one of those bipeds who by courtesy bear the name.

"I have told you, Mr. Lyonell," Rachel was saying, "that these long apologies are quite unnecessary; I am not in the least annoyed at what passed last night, nor did I either expect or require this visit."

"But I was dying to pay it. Upon my soul I haven't slept a wink for thinking how rude we were to you. Now do pardon it, my gracious Princess. Ah! what an enchanting Princess you seemed last night!"

"Did I?"

"As sure as I'm a living man, you ought to be a Princess in reality. I wish I could make you one."

"Thank you, Mr. Lyonell."

"So you are but a woman then, after all — my charming Mrs. Armadale," was the retort with a laugh. "You would'nt object to become a Princess, even though it was one of my making?"

"That being impossible, it seems to me that we are only wasting words. Cannot you find a subject more interesting?"

"Nothing can be more interesting to me, and there might be things more impossible, in the results at least. There's many a poor German prince who has not half so much in his power as the house of Lyonell, and its unworthy representative."

"Who, I suppose, expects me to contradict his confession of unworthiness, except, that no doubt the answer of his own conscience will save me that trouble." Ninian heard Rachel answer, with just the slightest touch of sarcasm perceptible through her invariable civility. "But this is a most needless expenditure of your politeness: and you have not yet entered upon the business which I understood you had to communicate, and which made me break through my rule of not admitting visitors."

"Except Edmund Græme. Ah, he is a most enviable fellow, and you are, indeed, too cruel, beautiful Mrs. Armadale. Your unkindness will kill me, as it killed poor Sir Arthur."

"You seem well-acquainted with my affairs."

"It was your affair, then? You acknowledge it at last! So you really refused the poor devil, and brought down his grey hairs to the grave with sorrow, or with gout?"

"I never heard before that it was allowable to cast *ridicule* on a woman, or on a dead man who could not

defend himself. This, however, is one of the many new lessons that society has the opportunity of learning from Mr. Lyonell."

"Now, indeed, you are too hard upon me, by my soul you are! and all because of my intense adoration for the most bewitching woman I know."

"Really, this conversation is of a character quite new on your part, and — excuse me for saying so — rather wearisome to me. Doubtless you think an actress can never have enough of flattery; but my small requirements in that line are very soon satisfied. Will you now condescend to plain speech, and let me hear what I believe you had to communicate?

"I — I — really, Mrs. Armadale, your wit is so brilliant, it quite dazzles one."

"I will be silent then. I will only look at you."

"That's worse and worse, unless you will smile too. It is quite impossible for me to exist longer, unless you smile upon me — beautiful Princess."

"There — I smile. Now what have you to say? Is it concerning your share in the theatre? or — you see I am acquainted with some secrets — has it to do with that little transaction of L. S. D., which you are always holding over the head of Mr. Edmund Græme?"

"Confound Mr. Edmund Græme! No, no, I never thought of him. I came to tell you that — in short — — I — I adore you."

(Ninian understood now why Mrs. Armadale, or at least Jane Sedley, had placed him there; indignantly he chafed in a position from which he had no power to free himself.)

"You adore me," said Rachel, with the most freezing indifferent politeness. "So many have told me; so did

my lover in the play last night. You seem to be imitating him now. But, really, Mr. Lyonell, the kneeling posture only appears graceful on the stage. Oblige me by rising."

"Mrs. Armadale, you are too severe; you are, indeed; when a man makes an offer in good earnest — an offer of his heart and fortune."

"Since you are in earnest, I will be so too. I can only answer, as you seem to be aware I have done to more than one gentleman before — that I have no intention of marrying."

"Marrying! Hum — ha! Quite right, my fair Princess. A great actress is much better without any such unnecessary tie. But still, if my devotion might hope —"

"Hope what, sir?"

"Why, as I before said — only I fear I did not quite explain myself — my heart, my fortune — an enormous fortune too — are yours eternally."

"I thank you. This then is what you came to tell me?"

"I did — I did, my angel."

"Again, I thank you."

Saying this, distinctly and clearly, as she had apparently taken care to say every word, she walked into the room where Ninian was. No fire lit her eyes, no glow of insulted womanhood was on her cheek. Only her lips, a little paler than usual, were pressed forcibly together.

"Mr. Græme, I am glad to find you here; you, being an old friend, can perhaps confirm my answer to a communication I have received. Will you come into this room?"

He obeyed. Distasteful as his position was, even he could not resist the fascination of control which Rachel seemed at times to exercise over every one. As for Mr. Lyonell, he was now positively dumbfoundered.

"This gentleman," said Mrs. Armadale, in her slow, clear voice, "this gentleman a few minutes ago did me the honour, and himself too, to make me what I believed to be a proposal of marriage. I refused him courteously, as a lady ought, but which courtesy I now find was quite unnecessary, since I had only to decline an offered fortune, not a hand. Will you, Mr. Græme, from your knowledge of my whole history, tell him — what doubtless will, in twenty-four hours, be repeated to half my acquaintance —- that while it is impossible for me to become his *wife*, it is equally impossible for me to dispense with that name. Therefore, himself and his friends will oblige me by seeing in me only the actress, and not again interfere with the private life or private feelings of the woman. Now, Mr. Lyonell, shall I ring for your carriage?"

Thoroughly crestfallen, shamed even beyond the power of returning insult, the man crept away, a fellow too cowardly and lukewarm in passion to be stirred up even to the sincerity of rage.

When he was gone, the actress stood a few moments gazing forwards with her blank cold eye, and then, putting out her hand as if for something to lean against, sat down.

"Oh, Rachel!" cried Ninian, touched by her silence now, more than by any of the passionate outbreaks which he had formerly witnessed in her. "Rachel, why do you expose yourself to all this? Why have you not more care over your womanly feelings; nay, your honour?"

"*My* honour!" Keen, even fierce, was the sarcasm that pointed these words — the only words she said. They revealed the grinding sense of degradation never to be wiped away — the burning humiliation which in the proud woman's breast had survived even the quenching of love. How should she repel men's insults with scorn? — she, who was already the thing they would have made her!

Poor wretch! who had had no teaching but that of imagination, passion, and cruel wrong — who had been brought at once from her darkness into the world's false glare, to be judged by the world's creed of honour and dishonour, ignorant of any higher hope, refuge, or pardon.

Ninian was thinking how he could talk to her — how soften her into some womanly pain, or perhaps win her from a career, for the constant suffering and degradation of which her public triumphs offered but poor atonement. Just as he was considering how best to do this, there entered his brother Edmund.

The youth looked surprised and discomfited at seeing who was with Rachel, but her kind welcome soon reassured him. It was a curious fact — showing how, when the individual idol is crushed to dust, the memory of the love itself still lingers — that if in Rachel lingered one touch of human tenderness, it was for the boy whom she had once fancied like what Geoffrey Sabine used to be. If ever she smiled or spoke softly, it was to Edmund. His entrance seemed to rouse her now.

"I am glad you are come. I have pleasant tidings for you, my young dramatist," said she, taking up a heap of newspapers that lay on the table. "Here — read — see what the critics say of you."

For a moment forgetting himself, the young author took the papers and read with glittering eyes; then a great cloud of shame seemed to come over him.

"And I who wrote thus and whom these people praise — was — what you saw me last night!" He dashed the papers down and walked to the window, touched to the quick.

"I came," he continued, advancing to Rachel, though not looking at his brother — "I came to say, will you forgive me for what must have been so odious to you last night?" And as he stood, in a humble attitude, his haggard cheeks were dyed with shame.

"Forgive you? So I do. But you must take care for the future, my poor Emund!" said Rachel, gravely. "I must not have you turning out as other men — vile, degraded."

"This is at least the first time I ever degraded myself in *your* eyes," interrupted Edmund, in a hoarse voice. "Whatever I am, I know what made me so; if you knew too, you would forgive me. You ought!"

Rachel held out her hand. "Say no more of this: let us talk about the play; and see! you have scarcely yet spoken to your brother."

Edmund looked fierce, obstinate, ready to brave the reproof that he expected to read in Ninian's face, but there was none. This silence was the keenest rebuke the lad could have had. He tried to rouse himself and struggle into conversation, but it was useless. The weak and sensitive nature which led him astray, effectually saved him from that hardness which alone makes error hopeless of cure.

"I must go," said he, after trying in vain to keep up a restless gaiety, and to shake off the melancholy

that possessed him. "I am very stupid, and I must go."

"Where?" asked Ninian, with a penetrating look.

Edmund became scarlet. Poor fellow! all his world-hardening could not keep down that token of an almost feminine susceptibility. "Somewhere with Lyonell. I met him at the end of the street."

"Very likely. He has just left my house. Did he tell you so?" said Rachel; and Ninian, though watching her closely, could not trace any change of look or manner. But Edmund seemed under an uneasy fear.

"He told me nothing. That was strange, when he has never been here before."

"Nor will be again. I do not take pleasure in Mr. Lyonell's acquaintance."

Edmund was silent, but he looked glad. The poor, foolish, jealous boy!

"I wish," said Ninian, in a voice that was very kind, and as free as he could make it from the admonitory tone — "I wish, Edmund, you would not ally yourself so closely with this young man. He does not seem a fit friend for you. Do not go to him to-day."

"Why not? Lyonell is a very good fellow — foppish, perhaps, and not over wise — but amusing in his way. And surely I am old enough to choose my own companions."

"If you knew them thoroughly — but you do not know this man. Besides, what claim can he have upon you?"

"Who said he had any?" cried Edmund, flashing up, terrified lest his brother should be further acquainted with his secrets. But Ninian was ignorant of them, and if Rachel knew, she betrayed none. "Don't interfere

between me and Lyonell. He is not exactly a gentleman, and perhaps a degree short of a saint; but I like him, and shall associate with him if I choose."

"I warn you not," said the elder brother, gravely.

"I too, warn you," added Rachel. The youth, angry as he was, turned to listen to *her*.

"Why do you speak thus? What is your reason?" asked he. Ninian tried to silence his brother; but Rachel prevented this.

"You think I should feel shame in telling Edmund," she said in a low tone to Mr. Græme. "What, shame in *me!*" Then she added, "Listen, my boy. You may keep up civility with him, as I am forced to do; but you must have no friendship with Mr. Lyonell."

"Why not?"

"Because he has acted like what virtuous people would call a villain, but which I, being only an actress, call — the way of the world. He came and offered me what to any other woman would have been an insult — love without marriage."

Edmund clenched his hands.

"Nay, do not mind this, it neither harms nor angers me. I tell it to you — boy as you are — because it may warn you, and on me the telling casts no shame — or else I cannot feel any."

She spoke thus, in pitiable calmness; but the youth who loved her was shaken by ungovernable rage.

"The coward — the scoundrel! But he shall answer this."

"How? Are you going to rise up on my behalf?" said she, with a bitter smile. "Are you thinking to fight a duel in defence of my —" She stopped; she could not utter the word "honour."

"Oh that I could fight for you, that I could defend you!" cried Edmund wildly. All sense of restraint vanished, even his brother's presence was forgotten. His impetuous boyish passion broke forth like a tide.

"Rachel, it is horrible for you to be exposed to this, yet it has been so before and will be again. This is a wicked world, as *I* know — for I have plunged into all its wickedness."

"I little knew that."

"No; nor did you know the reason why. Because I was mad — wretched, and tried to drown my misery in any way. Because I loved you, — Rachel."

She looked at him with a sort of incredulous pity. The lad spoke rapidly on — the strong passion within giving him at once boldness and firmness.

"Do not answer, — I know you will never love either me, or anybody — I knew it from the first. But, listen. I am not a boy now — soon, I may be a man earning fortune and fame. I shall never ask you for love, but I can save you from all these miseries — I can give you my home, my protection, and my name. Will you marry me, Rachel?"

He heard a sigh — it was not hers. He looked round and perceived Ninian, whose whole soul was moved within him at sight of the unhappy boy.

"Yes! I say it again — in Ninian's presence, that he may bear me witness — I am unworthy of your love, unworthy in everything but in loving you. You shall rule me, guide me; I will be to you brother, friend — anything you like; only in the world's eye let me be your husband."

Rachel paused, holding his hands with a sorrowful tenderness.

"He loves *me* — he would marry *me!* Poor boy — poor boy!"

Her lip began to quiver, there came a faint dew to her stony eyes, — then she unloosed her hands from his, slowly and gently.

"No, Edmund, it cannot be. If I had foreseen this — but you are very young, and will forget the pain. Go to your brother, he will comfort you. Take care of him, Mr. Græme — take care of my poor boy!"

So saying she rose and walked half-way towards the door, then turned and looked at the youth, who had sunk with his head buried in the cushions of her chair.

"Poor Edmund — generous Edmund!" she murmured; and coming back touched his forehead with her lips, coldly but softly — as a mother might have done. Her kindness, her tender pity, were more conclusive than any harsh refusal; and when her face vanished from his sight, the boy knew that his youthful dream had likewise vanished — for ever.

Passively — without the slightest resistance — he suffered himself to be taken home by his brother.

CHAPTER X.

"You'll stay at home with us to-night, will you not, Edmund?" said Ninian, the first words he had ventured to say since they left Mrs. Armadale's house.

"Stay? — Why should I? You don't want me — not one of you! I'm not fit for such saints, nor they for me. Leave me alone!"

He went up into his own room, and locked himself in there, never stirring, until late in the evening Ninian heard his quick footsteps descending the staircase and passing out at the front door.

It was no time for hesitation — a madman was not less to be trusted than this desperate boy. Ninian lost no time, but followed.

Edmund went where his brother guessed he would go, — to the theatre. It was the second night of his play, when the house was full of strangers who were not likely to recognise the author. However, Ninian saw him go into the retired region called in theatrical parlance "the slips;" while he himself crept unobserved to the back of the boxes, and watched thence his every movement.

It was a piteous sight. The shouters in the gallery — the lady-weepers in the boxes — the pleased critics in the pit — all enjoying the play, little thought of its unhappy author there. He sat very quiet, concealing himself as much as possible, until Mrs. Armadale came on the stage.

She performed — as actresses must, whatever be their inner life or suffering; — the public has nothing to do with that. The audience knew not of a little room in a street close by, where was acted some hours before a drama of real life, mournful as that of the barbaric princess. Even Rachel herself seemed to have fogotten it. She roused the house into thunders of applause. Some people also praised the play and its author, calmly, condescendingly, as on second nights audiences do.

Meanwhile Edmund sat, his burning eyes fixed upon his heroine, the living embodiment of all his dreams. Ah! there was no doubting under what inspiration he had written his beautiful play! Of all temporary fascinations there can be none greater than that exercised by a great actress over an ardent mind still influenced by the poetic glamour of the stage. A wild idolatry, which invests one woman with the qualities of all her impersonations, and identifies her with the greatest ideal creations of the dramatic art. And when, besides being an actress — every night a three hours' goddess — she is in herself such a woman as Rachel was, truly her worshipper is in a more hopeless condition still! Even Ninian — the grave Ninian — did not so much wonder at the madness of the boy.

It might not last — its very fervidness might foretel its end. And he was so young still; it must be a strong passion that happening to a youth of only twenty-one can leave behind it a life-long pain. But now, at its climax, there was no saying to what desperation it might goad the unhappy Edmund.

During the performance, Ninian, hidden himself, never took his eyes off his brother. When the curtain fell, and the beautiful princess gratified the house with

that most unpleasant resuscitation of dead heroes and heroines which has become necessary to an admiring audience — when, dressed in the mockery of customary obeisances, Rachel crossed the stage — Ninian looked up and saw poor Edmund watching her too, with his ghastly cheek and eager eyes. Immediately afterwards the boy disappeared.

Had he gone to seek his idol? No, that was not likely. Mr. Græme knew, that blind and insensible to all emotion as she was, Rachel would at least have the womanly forethought and pity to keep Edmund out of her sight. Still, after some consideration, he went and inquired for her; but she had as usual left immediately after the play.

He knew the way she went, for Edmund had told him; adding, how night after night the stage princess crept home through the dark quiet streets with her faithful servant — two poor humble women. There was something touching about the romance of the thing — sufficient to rouse Edmund's excited imagination. Ninian was sure that many a night there must have been a guardian shadow watching at street corners, as he himself was watching now.

At last he saw them — Rachel's tall figure, and the little old woman that crept close to her, ever turning round with anxiety at every passing footstep. But Rachel walked straight on, heeding nothing.

"Mrs. Armadale!" She stopped. "It is only I — Ninian Græme. Do not be afraid."

"Afraid? — I afraid!" It was indeed an unnecessary caution.

"I will not detain you a minute. I am looking for Edmund. Have you seen him?"

"I have not." The answer was subdued, even sad.

"That is well. You will not see him again, Rachel?"

"No!"

"Thank you. And now tell me, where am I likely to find him? He was at the theatre to-night, and left."

"Poor Edmund!" She half-sighed and walked on, without answering the question. But Jane Sedley whispered,

"There's a place they call 'The Stores,' where he sometimes goes after the play; most like you'll find the poor lad there. Now good night, Mr. Græme; my mistress must go home by herself," sharply added the faithful "dragon" — object of Lyonell's hate — and no wonder.

To say "The Stores" was a discreditable place for a gentleman to frequent, would perhaps be captious, seeing to what lengths "gentlemen" are accustomed to go in these days. But it was not exactly a paradise to the taste of Ninian Græme, who happened to be neither a smoker nor a lover of wine. He waited there in considerable mental and physical discomfort for nearly an hour, but Edmund never came. At last he made up his mind to go home, to the honest, peaceful, rather "slow" fireside of Professor Reay; where the worthy man was probably at this moment sitting, in slippered ease, his little wife brewing for him the only spirituous drink he ever indulged in — the weakest and most harmless of whisky-toddy. Perhaps Ninian himself was so feeble-minded as to prefer this sort of domestic coziness to the noise and cigar fumes of the Stores, for he rose up, de-

termining to make his exit from that admirable place of entertainment, in the faint hope that perhaps his brother might after all be found safe at home.

Just as he was passing out, he saw Edmund, with some other young men, coming in.

He had pictured the boy wandering about hither and thither — solitary, moody, despairing; he saw him in the midst of his gayest companions of the previous night, laughing loudly — talking wildly, with an incoherence that was either excitement or drink. Nay, the other men, older than himself — clever men, too — were even making a jest and mock of the youth. It was fine sport for them.

"So, my young Achilles, you are quite determined, and are thirsting for his blood. Poor Lyonell!" said one of them.

"And you'll not say whence comes this fearful vengeance —

'Direful spring
Of woes unnumbered.'

"Who is the Briseis, my boy?"

"I — I will not tell," stammered Edmund, keeping in his confused brain just wisdom enough for this.

"Mind you pay one debt of honour before you claim another," hinted a bitter-tongued wit. "People might say, if you winged Lyonell, that it was to prevent his putting his hand in your pockets with a polite reminder of the three letters, I. O. U."

Edmund started, and a dim light seemed to break upon his bewildered faculties. From the corner where — afraid of irritating his brother by his presence — Ninian had drawn back, he could see distinctly the workings of the poor lad's face; though he lost much of the conversa-

tion that passed. He could trace the vain strugglings of reason with which Edmund strove to govern his excitement, and settle some connected plan. It was for money, evidently; and the rest of them were amusing themselves with proposing imaginary schemes.

"— Borrow Fortunatus's purse!"

"— Petition the Literary Fund!"

"— Go to California!"

"No — try a Scotch gold mine, if there is such a thing, my dear fellow," said the most sneering of the number. "Make an onslaught upon that solemn brother of yours, who buttons up his coat as though there were a plum in bank-notes lying in each pocket. He seems a bland, mild sort of a fellow too."

Edmund laughed — and then recollecting what he was laughing at, some sense of shame and indignation arose. "I did not notice what you said. My brother — he is a good brother to me. No one shall dare to ridicule him."

"Well, old fellow, pray keep cool. Now, gentlemen — oyez! oyez! Ten pounds reward to whoever will win two hundred for Mr. Edmund Græme!"

"I have a plan," said a gentleman of the sarcastic tongue. "I wonder — considering all his experience in that line — that our young friend here never thought of it before."

"What is it?"

"Not quite so loud if you please; Græme might not like his little peculiarities to be generally known." He made a few remarks in a lower tone, to which Edmund listened greedily. Very soon afterwards, Ninian saw the latter rise and go out.

He followed. It was late; the theatres had turned

out their last relics of audience, and the streets were growing quiet and deserted. From lamp to lamp Ninian easily traced that tall, thin, boyish figure, with the long, light-brown curls — the same vision which Lindsay used to watch so proudly, as day by day it passed up the avenue at The Gowans. — Poor Lindsay! How foolish women are!

Edmund turned along Regent-street. All the shops and houses were shut up, except that through some second-floor windows might be seen lights — generally two high lamps, visible through the thin blinds. There were no open doors visible; but these lamps were sufficient beacon to those who knew the mysteries of the place.

Ninian watched his brother approach one of these — pass it — return again, and examine more closely — then, under the next street-lamp, take out his purse and count its contents. At last, so quickly that Mr. Græme hardly perceived how he entered, the youth disappeared into the house.

It was one of those places — rightly named "hells" — a London gambling-house.

Ninian was uncertain what to do. To follow and compel him home, was impossible; Edmund was of age, and his brother had no legal right over him. Even the thought of being watched might drive him to desperation. But to leave him was out of the question. Ninian resolved to wait, if it were the whole night, until he had seen him quit the house.

He did so before very long, rushing out half-maddened — not with ruin, but success. He staggered into the street, recklessly holding a handful of bank-notes, *gazing* at them with greedy eyes. So occupied was he,

that he never looked up until he ran against some one standing in the street.

"What are you doing here, Edmund?"

The cold, clear voice was his brother's — the arm, stern and strong, that linked itself in his, was his brother's also. Edmund stood speechless.

They walked on a few paces, Ninian keeping firm hold, — and then the boy rebelled.

"What is this for? Have you been dogging my heels? Let me go, I say."

Ninian let him go.

Edmund stopped a moment, hardly comprehending where he was, and what he had intended to do. Then his mind seemed to grow clearer. Secretly he clutched the money in his hand, and assuming an unconcerned air said, "Good night, brother; this is my way."

"And mine, too," added the other quietly.

"Do you mean to follow me? Am I to be watched about like a child? Do it at your peril!" And he shook his clenched fist.

"Edmund!" Somehow at the tone of that voice, perfectly self-possessed — neither haughty nor angry — the frantic hand dropped down rebuked.

"What do you want with me, brother? Make haste, and let me go; I have an engagement to-night."

"Where?"

"I shall not tell you."

"I will tell *you*, then. You have been gaming, in order to win the money you owe Mr. Lyonell. You are now going to find him — pay him — then seek a quarrel with him, and have either a duel to-morrow morning or a street row to-night."

Edmund drew back. In his face was the confession

of all which Ninian's penetration had lighted upon as the truth.

"But," the other continued, "I, being a good deal older and a little wiser than you, think this proceeding would not be to my brother's credit, or that of our family. Therefore I will prevent it if I can."

Edmund — gentle by nature, and unaccustomed to contend, especially with his elder brother — seemed less desirous of warfare than escape. He tried to cross the street, but the fumes of wine in his brain were too much for him.

Ninian laid on his shoulder a firm hand.

"Come home, my boy — come home."

Quiet — even gentle, as the manner was, it contained something of command against which the weak Edmund struggled in vain. He suffered his brother to take his arm and walk with him down the street towards home.

After a while his desperate purpose seemed to dawn again.

"Brother! — Ninian! — I must go," entreated he. "I will do no harm. I only want to pay the fellow what I owe, and tell him he is a villain. I'll not fight — if you object. Only let me give him the money."

"Where is it?"

"Here in my hand! I won it all — luck was with me. Never was there such a run of cards. Ha, ha!"

"Have you been often to that place?"

"Come now, don't be pumping me. Be a good fellow, can't you! It is a very respectable place."

"And you won the whole sum to-night? You have it in your hand there?"

"Yes, every pound. All right — count it! Hurra!

Hazard's the king of all games." And he flourished the notes triumphantly.

Ninian took them out of his hand — spread them out one over the other, doubled them, and before the youth could resist, tore them once — twice — thrice — until they were converted into the smallest fragments. Then he threw them into the street, carelessly, as if they had been a handful of dust.

"What are you doing?" cried Edmund furiously.

"Just what I would always do with stolen property."

"Do you dare to call mine stolen? Am I a thief?"

"Every gambler is for the time being — I will show you that clearly to-morrow. Now, come home."

His stern calmness, his unflinching will, appalled the boy. Unresisting, Edmund suffered himself to be led home.

Arrived there, all his remaining faculties became numbed in the stupor of intemperance and the exhaustion of spent fury. The whole night, Ninian, fearing to leave him, remained by the poor lad's bedside. Never had he kept such a vigil since the night he heard of his father's death. Little he then thought that the next watch would be beside his dead father's ruined son.

Ruined! — no! Edmund, the child of such pride and tenderness, should not be ruined. That tenderness must win him back still — or else, abjuring it, his elder brother must assume a father's rights. Only, in some way or other, the boy *must* be saved.

The first thing was to shield him from that disgrace which in a mind like his was sure to produce utter desperation. Therefore, he managed so that even Katie knew not the whole extent of his brother's shame. He sat alone by the boy's bedside; until towards morning

Edmund, being a little recovered, fell into a sound sleep. Then Ninian went to his own room, lay down for an hour, rose, and breakfasted, lest Tinie should suspect anything wrong. When late in the forenoon Edmund awoke, he found his brother sitting beside him. Their eyes met — one was cold, the other defiant.

"Are you better?"

"Nothing was wrong with me. What are you here for?"

Ninian made no answer.

"I will not be watched in this manner — Leave me! I want to dress and go out."

"It would be better not, I think — after last night."

"What of last night? But, in any case, it was no affair of yours."

"None — except that I will not see any young man, much less my own brother, ruined — if I can help it."

"Well, suppose I do go to ruin — what will it signify? — Who cares?"

"*I* care."

"And who will prevent me?"

"*I* will!"

The boy started up in bed with passionate violence.

"Dare you?" — But his dizzy, hot, drink-oppressed brain was too strong for his will — he sank back upon his pillow with a groan.

"Keep quiet, Edmund! You must, or God knows what may happen to you." And with a care almost womanly, he bound a wet cloth round the poor lad's burning head. "Are you easier now?"

"Do not speak to me — let me alone. I wish I were dead! — that's the only hope for such a miserable wretch as I!"

"Not quite; when you have Lindsay."

Edmund clasped his hands over his wan face, and hid it on the pillow. He did not speak another word for many minutes. Ninian asked him softly "if he were asleep?"

"No! It would be better if I were. It would be a blessing if I never woke again. You would think so, and Lindsay too. But I don't care — whatever becomes of me, I don't care!"

He tried to assume a daring indifference, but in vain. Physical prostration, and the natural gentleness and irresolution of his character, overcame him. A prodigal he might be, but nothing would ever make Edmund a hardened sinner.

"My boy, whether you care or not, *we* care," said Ninian, kindly. "But I will talk to you another time. Now, try to rise, and come and take a walk with me. It is a lovely morning."

"I hate it! — I hate the light! — I hate everything!"

"Nay, that is wild talking. You must be reasonable. Only get a little better, and in a few days you shall come back with me to Scotland."

"No — no. Your quiet life at home would drive me mad! Besides, I must stay here; and go on with my old ways. I can't get free."

"You *must* get free — I will help you. Have confidence in your brother. Remember," and Ninian smiled sorrowfully, "I was a young man myself once."

Slowly, imperceptibly, so that they seemed less confessions than exclamations of remorse and pain, the elder brother won from the younger a story which it is needless to repeat here. Enough, — that it has been the

story of thousands cast into the whirlpool of life, adding to all the passions of youth that keen susceptibility to every form of pleasurable sensation which is the peculiar characteristic of genius. Heaven have mercy on such! for heaven only knows with how much they have to struggle. And all honour be unto the noble few — not those who were never tempted, but those who, being tempted, have come out from the battle victorious!

Edmund's heart once opened, poured itself out unrestrained. The elder brother listened to the sad tale of extravagance, intemperance, degrading companionships and unholy loves; over the long catalogue of which rested the perpetual shade of the one misery of which Edmund did not speak, though probably it was the origin of all — his hopeless passion for Rachel.

"Now," said the young man at last, with a bitter laugh — "now you see. Such is the end of 'the Genius of the Family!'"

"Not the end — God forbid!"

"He cannot — or He will not," was the reckless answer. "This life is slowly killing me. Look here!" and he held up his hand, thin, withered, and shaking like that of an old man. "You might 'almost see through it,' as people say. No — no; a year or two more will finish me, and the sooner the better."

Perhaps Ninian judged at their true value these ravings, always the resource of miserable youth. He only said: "We will not talk of the future, my dear boy. The question is, what must be done at present? Again I would *advise*," — he laid a gentle stress on the word — "that you go home with me for a time."

"And I say again, I cannot!"

"Why not?"

"First, because I will not. Secondly — if you want the plain common sense of the matter — I dare not. Look in that desk, and you'll find three hundred pounds' worth of good reasons why Edmund Græme, just come of age, should, if he left London, be caught and sent to prison as a runaway debtor. There! — that would be a credit to the family — would it not?"

Ninian had not yet considered this difficulty. He looked very grave, Edmund watched closely his elder brother's face; it seemed to bring back to his variable mind old times, far more innocent and happy than these.

"I wish," he sighed — "I almost wish I could go back to The Gowans."

Ninian made no answer — he was in deep thought. At last he said: "Edmund, give me the key of your desk. You would not show me only half-confidence, would you?"

Edmund objected at first, then answered despondently: "Do as you like. Whatever you find out, it's no matter to a poor half-dead fellow like me. I shall not trouble you long."

Mr. Græme unlocked the desk, and passing over a farrago of papers — confined himself to the business secrets, — the numerous unpaid debts; that one to Mr. Lyonell, which the world would entitle "a debt of honour," — being at the head of the list. It was a list long enough to drag the young author down into a hopeless slough of despond. The like has happened to many another, — forced to work his brains with a perpetual millstone of debt around his neck, knowing that by nothing except dishonesty can he free himself from the burden.

Ninian looked over the bills; tied them up again in his business-like way, without any comment whatsoever. Edmund was silent too, either in sullen despondency, or else exhausted and half-stupified, he had fallen into a doze. The elder brother moved away, and stood in the clear light by the half-open window, which jutted out on the leads. There was a long box of mignionette, over which the pert London sparrows came hopping and twittering. A thought, — not inconsequent, nor irreverent, — flitted across Ninian's mind, of those who were once bade to "fear not," being "*of more value than many sparrows.*"

It touched nearly upon a plan he had in view. The sum laid up as he deemed for his marriage, and then vainly intended to be sacrificed for the good of Hope's father, was of course in his possession still. The first pain being conquered, he had placed it by securely; from the feeling that now, weakened as his health was, he had no certainty for the future. He found a comfort in thinking, that did anything happen, he had at least something to keep him for a time from positive dependence on the children he had brought up. It was the only trace of pride, the only thought of self, that dwelt in the breast of the elder brother.

This sum would be just sufficient to save Edmund from the results of his sad career. Freed from debt — unashamed before the world — placed for a while out of reach of temptation — he might yet be saved. Nay, he must be saved — poor Lindsay's boy!

Ninian stood — the bright light from the attic-window showing every line in his worn face, every white thread — there were but too many — in his hair. But *he looked* at peace, even glad. Quickly in his own

mind he portioned out his money of love's heaping, of which every coin had been laid together with a quivering of the heart. — Thus often we gather up treasures, and find them end as sacrifices; but the sacrifice is the holier after all.

Mr. Græme went up to his brother once more. "Are you awake, Edmund?"

"Ay!"

"You had better rise now. Leave me these." He glanced at the bundle of bills he held. "You cannot pay them, so I will. But I think it right to tell you that I do so at a great sacrifice — of which knowing our circumstances, you must yourself be aware. Nevertheless, I do it with full trust that the same will not happen again, and that for the future I will have no need to blush for my brother Edmund."

His voice, firm and grave as it was, trembled at the close. He held out his hand to the poor prodigal; — Edmund sprung up in bed.

"You don't mean this? It is impossible! You cannot do it — or if you could, I would not suffer it."

You must! Some day, when you are a great author, and I an old man — we will have our reckoning."

Edmund looked up into the face that wore a kind though serious smile. "Oh Ninian — oh my brother!" he cried, and grasping the outstretched hand, sobbed over it like a child.

CHAPTER XI.

Edmund was saved; but not without many weeks of languishing under that best chastener, and oftentimes chief preserver — severe bodily illness. All the world, the foul hollow world in which he had lately lived, faded from the poor boy's knowledge; all his arena of pain and pleasure dwindled into one small chamber, where Lindsay's face brought back nothing but childish days; — Lindsay, who knew nothing — and whom Ninian took care never should know — of her boy's degradation. After a season, Edmund woke out of his physical and moral delirium, thoroughly whole and sound.

He went back with Lindsay to The Gowans; — with Lindsay only — for Ninian fancied he seemed more at ease with her. There are so many crises in men's lives when they shrink from their own sex, and can only find comfort with mother, sister, or friends. So Mr. Græme made some excuse for remaining behind a week or two longer, and sent Edmund home with Lindsay.

The morning they started he had been to see them off; and walked back with his sister Tinie under his arm, cheerfully, even merrily, — for his heart was so lightened about his brother that there dawned in it a feeling very like happiness.

Happiness! Perhaps that is a wrong word to apply. No one, either man or woman, who has undergone what Ninian had, can ever again know the sensation which

young people call "being happy." You might as well expect quiet middle age to play baby-play, or dance as a child dances in a field of daisies. It is impossible! — as impossible as that there should be dew in the afternoon. But to say that those whom God in His infinite wisdom does not see fit to make happy in the one thing which is their life's greatest longing and need, are therefore to be unhappy evermore, is a false and wrong saying. Ninian Græme was now neither broken-hearted, nor, what is worse, bitter-hearted. He indulged neither in melancholy nor cynicism, but walked steadily and serenely on, with his face turned heavenwards — living his appointed life; ay, and in many ways enjoying it.

To see him now, passing with Tinie along the streets — which even in London looked bright on that summer morning — chatting and laughing with her, planning how in a month or two she and he were to lay a tremendous plot against the Professor's peace of mind and of household, by dragging him northwards for a holiday and reinstating Miss Reay in — street *pro tem.*, — to see all this any one would have thought Mr. Græme the merriest of all midle-aged gentlemen; for he was fast attaining that era now.

"I declare you have almost talked me to death, you little Mrs. Professor. I'm sure, for loquacity and versatility of humour, the college would have a much better bargain in you than in Kenneth," said Ninian, as with a comical pretence of exhaustion he threw himself into the first easy chair he came to, and settled himself there, to ponder in quiet thankful mood how well these weeks of anxiety had ended. Remembering, too, with a peace and fatherly joy that was inexpressible, how full of grateful meaning had been Edmund's parting look. He

thought that in course of time, when his scattered flock had all formed into settled homesteads, and especially when the third generation was springing up, he should certainly be the most contented old bachelor-uncle in Christendom!

Many a poet has sung laments over departed youth; did any ever sing, or chant — for it would be like a psalm, — the peace, the joy, the comfort of growing old: of knowing passions dead, temptations conquered, experience won; individual interests become universal, and vain fantastic hopes merged into sublime strong-builded faith — faith which makes of death its foundation-stone, and has for its summit — Eternity? The "Hymn to Old Age" would be not unworthy of a great poet. Who will write it?

Ninian Græme certainly could not; but he lived it and looked it, sitting in his arm-chair and listening to "the small *Professoress*," as he sometimes called her, singing up and down the stairs. At last there was a slight pause in her vocalism, and she burst into the room like a Maybreeze, laden with some invisible but unequivocal pleasure.

"Only to think! — Dear me! — and Our Sister gone home this very day! — If she had but known!"

"Known what?"

"Ah, guess! — I'll put the letter on the back of your head, as the mesmerists do. Now read."

Ninian changed countenance slightly. "Tell me, Tinie. No ill news?"

"Not a bit of it — I am delighted, and so will you be. We'll go and call for her this very day. Oh, what fun! to see little Hope with baby!"

I have said how Ninian's feelings had sunk down to

a calm level; but he would not have been a living man, could he have heard these tidings unmoved. He felt the blood rushing to his heart, and his lips whitening — all those painful physical signs of emotion which some can control: he could more than any one, in the time when he was young and strong. But this struggle did not last. He rose from it no weak sentimentalist, but a brave man, who when passion became unlawful had beaten it down, until in its ashes was only warmth enough to keep alit the affection which he might duly feel for the child of his guiding, without any wrong to the wife of Mr. Ulverston.

"Hope is come home, then. Is she well?" The steady voice, the composed look — good angels, who teach humanity to wrestle and to conquer, would have rejoiced in both!

"She is not quite well, she says, and so has been sent home with baby. But read the note yourself — quickly, too, — for I'll just order Kenneth's dinner, and off we go, you and I, this very morning to Brompton."

Ninian shrank back. "I cannot — I have some engagements. And it seems to me you two had better meet alone."

"Now, that *is* nonsense! I call it a shame, too, when Hope was so fond of you. Are you afraid, because her husband is absent? Do you think it would make him jealous?"

Mr. Græme looked at Tinie so gravely, that the young wife felt herself rebuked for her foolish jest. He added, grasping at a reason which had not struck him till then, "I know, though you do not, that Mr. Ulverston has no great liking for me. He may not choose me to renew acquaintance with him or with his wife."

"Now that is ridiculous punctilio. I'll tell Hope all about it. And if you don't come with me to Brompton, I vow I'll go and fetch her here," cried the resolute Mrs. Kenneth.

Ninian made no reply. He was whirled to and fro like a reed.

"And she, poor lassie, who was so unhappy, as I know, because she feared you were offended at her marrying so suddenly without consulting you! She will think you are angry with her still, and that is why you do not come. It is quite cruel of you, brother Ninian. Here I am so pleased — and there you sit with your head on your hands, as quiet as possible, just as if you did not care a straw for Hope and her baby! Ah, now, say you'll come!"

He rose up slowly, and said, "I will." Then muttering something about an engagement he could fulfil while she was getting ready, he took his hat and quitted the house. When he returned, Tinie was waiting — merry, bonnie, blooming — dressed with the care natural to a young wife, who wishes to impress upon a former companion the sense of her own newly-attained matrimonial consequence.

Her elder brother rather silently gave her his arm, and they went off to Brompton together.

Mrs. Reay, fast talker as she was, could not talk in omnibuses, consequently she smothered her little feelings beneath enforced taciturnity. Only at times Ninian vainly lent an ear to ejaculations, in which there was always something about "Hope" and "Hope's baby."

As they rolled on in that dull, heavy-laden people's equipage, with passengers turning in or turning out, each bent on his or her own doings, each with a life

and its history — Ninian sat in his corner with head depressed, so that all the features were in shadow. So best! — Perhaps if one could read hearts, or even faces, there would be many a strange story learnt in a London omnibus!

The brother and sister neared their destination, and got out.

"It is only a step further — I know the house quite well," Tinie said. "Lady Ulverston lives there — keeping it for them, — I suppose. Hope sent her to visit me — and I have visited her several times — but that poor old Sir Peter is *so* stupid! Did you ever see him?"

Ninian could not recollect. He seemed stupid himself, and silent too; but Tinie's joyance sufficed for both.

"There's the house; I know it by those acacia-trees. And the magnolia — isn't it beautiful?"

He lifted up his eyes and said, "Yes." He had a notion, too, that it was indeed beautiful — that there was a sleepy warm air — a stirring of acacia-boughs — a soft languid sense of summer. But everything around him seemed in a sort of haze.

Tinie's hand was on the bell, which rung sharply — startingly, as bells always will, when one waits some life or death answer to the summons.

"Is Mrs. Ulverston at home?" Yes — she was. Ninian walked up the garden, knowing that in one minute he should see her. The face — his darling's face — so well remembered — glimmered before his fancy. But crossing the threshold he paused, and, with an inward convulsive throe, the dream melted into nothingness.

— He was merely Ninian Græme, coming with his sister to pay a visit to their old friend, now Mrs. Ulverston.

With a step that never faltered, he followed Tinie into the drawing room — a pretty room, with glass doors that opened on a little lawn.

"She is not here — I hope she will not keep us waiting long. Really I feel quite nervous and sentimental," cried Tinie, moving about. Ninian did not move, but sat down.

"I declare — that must be Hope — look — brother!" He looked out. On the lawn, under the shadow of a great acacia-tree, was a lady, with a nurse and child; she had just taken the baby, and stood — her figure thrown back in that attitude which makes a young mother with an infant in her arms one of the most graceful pictures in the world. Her head was half-turned round, and her curls — were tangled in the fingers of Hope's child!

He had used to see that picture often in days gone by, when his soul was thrilled with future dreamings. He saw it now — not as he had longed, but as Heaven had willed it should be. His eyes did not close; he tried to look calmly: but for a moment he felt his strength fail, and all his limbs tremble. Tinie had bounded out of the window, and he was alone for a minute or two. It was well! He had time to gather firmness and to pray. Very soon, he went forward to meet Mrs. Ulverston.

She had seen him and was crossing the lawn with Tinie. Her step was not hurried, but quiet and matronly, for she had her baby still in her arms. Coming closer, there was visible in her face that inexplicable change which marks even the most girlish wife and mother. As she advanced, holding out one hand while the other clasped her babe, this her new likeness merci-

fully obliterated the former one. Ninian saw in her — not the "child" so passionately beloved; but the woman standing in her sanctity of motherhood, awaking only a tender reverence and regard.

Hope gave him her hand, but did not speak. She was pale, and tears trembled on her eyelids. It was natural, when after the great change in her life she again met these dear old friends. She said as much — in a sort of excuse for being thus moved. And once more, with a half-pleading gesture, which expressed all the doubts which had troubled her mind, she held out her hand to Mr. Græme.

"It was kind of you to come and see me. I should have been so hurt — as Tinie says — if you had not."

"Then I am glad I came." He pressed cordially the little hand — which once more returned and folded itself over the baby.

"Look at it!" cried Tinie, pulling the shawl aside in feminine delight at the infantile creation. "Isn't it the prettiest baby that ever was seen? And it's only four months old!"

"Four months and twelve days," smiled the young mother, with that pertinacy of tenderness which counts every hour since the possession of its joy. Looking upon the tiny features, all the paleness of her own grew into roses; and the shadow in her eyes — for there was a faint shadow there — lightened into perfect happiness. Proudly she showed the little face, and soft pink hands clutching at everything; then, holding the baby up to the best advantage, said, with an appealing glance to Ninian, "Here he is — How do you like my boy?"

"Take him, uncle Ninian," exclaimed Mrs. Reay, laughing. "You'll not hurt him. You know you have had good practice before now."

Ninian did not exactly obey; but he stooped and kissed the infant. The little thing, just beginning to notice faces, put its fingers on his lips and eyes. It gave him a strange feeling — this touch of Hope's child. He kissed it once more, and his voice was hoarse and choked as he murmured, "God bless it!"

"What is his name? His papa's I suppose?" inquired Tinie.

"No; Mr. Ulverston does not like his own Christian name."

"— Which, by-the-by, I never chanced to hear. What is it? A *very* ugly one?"

But here the child made one of those sudden bounds which lively babies are always attempting — at the imminent risk of broken necks and dislocated spines. Whereupon the frightened young mother quite forgot everything but his infant majesty, who evidently ruled all her thoughts and affections.

"I am hardly strong enough to hold him — he is so active even now, and has such a will of his own. I fear he will turn out a most headstrong young gentleman, will Master Walter."

"Is that his name, then?"

"Yes. I longed to call him Ninian," said Hope, with a timidly affectionate look. "But my husband does not like Scottish names. Otherwise it would have been a pleasure to have called my boy after my dear friend and brother."

"Thank you — that was kind," Ninian answered. His voice was very low — but his steady look never wavered.

"You left Mr. Ulverston abroad? Will he follow you soon? Are you not very dull living here without your husband? Why did he not bring you himself?" questioned the loquacious Mrs. Reay.

Hope looked grave — much graver than when she had been talking about her baby. She merely said, "He was detained — he will follow when he can;" — and suffered the conversation to change. Very soon, the baby-tyrant manifesting symptoms of rebellion in the shape of various loud outcries, was dismissed lingeringly from her tender arms; and Mrs. Ulverston re-entered the drawing-room with her guests.

Once there, the excitement of her child's presence and of her own passing emotion having quite subsided, it became apparent how great was the difference between the Hope that now was, and the Hope that had been. She looked still youthful; nor, though delicate and pale, did she seem greatly worn, or ill, or even unhappy. But there was something wanting — a change visible perhaps to no eye save that which had long learnt to watch her and read her through; nevertheless, it was there.

She talked with all her old tender warmth of her friends at The Gowans — lingering over pleasant scenes gone by — remembering every little thing about everybody — smiling with Tinie over the eccentric love-passages which terminated in that young damsel's marrying the worthy Professor.

"Well, it was funny," cried Mrs. Kenneth, laughing and blushing. "Only to think that you and I were daundering about the Clyde with our future husbands! You little knew that I had all the while a sort of kindness for mine, poor fellow. And I'm sure no one ever

suspceted that you were in love with Mr. Ulverston. Why, he was *my* true-love then."

"Was he?" and there lurked something painful beneath Hope's smile. "Oh! he is always having some poetic love or other. I never ask any jealous questions of my husband."

"But you *were* in love with him? — Confess now," persisted Tinie.

"I loved him when I married him, or I should not have married at all," answered Hope gravely. But in the tone of the words "I loved him" was something which counteracted their meaning. They were said plainly, in the openness of duty, not with the drooping tremulous smile which lurks beneath the confession of that tenderness which, however confessed, can never express half its own fulness.

Shortly afterwards, Lady Ulverston appeared; and while she and Mrs. Reay entered into conversation, Hope came towards Ninian, who was sitting by the window. He rose and gave her his chair, thus unintentionally marking the difference between Mrs. Ulverston and the young Hope, in relation to whom he had been accustomed to receive respect rather than show it. She seemed aware of this, for her manner, though gentle, was full of the dignity of a mother and a wife. There was in it not a trace of "the child."

"I cannot tell you how glad I am you came," said she. "I thought from your not writing that perhaps you were displeased with me."

"No; how could that be?"

"I feared that you must suppose it so strange in me to say what I did to you about Mr. Ulverston, and to

marry him a week after. But there were urgent reasons, as you would acknowledge did you know all."

"I know whatever you did would be done from right motives," said Ninian, seeing she paused.

"— If I could only explain! My father, for instance, whom Mr. Ulverston could only aid when he was *his* father. Then he — Mr. Ulverston I mean — had to go abroad at once, and could not bear to leave me unprotected — he was so kind, and I so grateful — and Lady Ulverston and my father urged me. I cannot tell how it was, but I yielded, and we were married. Still, I should have been happier if I had but had my adopted brother to say 'God bless her!'"

"He says so now," answered Ninian. And they shook hands, the gesture of advance being on Hope's part. But it was a mere handshaking — a testifying of cordial kindness. By tacit consent, both seemed to understand that the outward tenderness of the fraternal bond between them was necessarily ended for evermore.

They ceased the conversation, during which Hope had seemed slightly agitated, and returning to the others, talked of ordinary things, interesting to all parties, for an hour or more. Then Mrs. Reay began to speculate on the probability of Kenneth's coming home and being horrified to find his wife absent.

"Is that so very wonderful?" said Hope, smiling. "Are you really grown domesticated, Tinie?"

"Domesticated! — I'm the steadiest, most sedate little wife imaginable! and Kenneth is certainly the best husband in England — ahem! — Mr. Ulverston being now in France, you know; so don't be cross."

"Oh, no!" Hope smiled, but it was rather a pensive

smile, or else Ninian thought so. There was one thing only which weighed on his spirit now — a doubt, a question which it was impossible he could ask, but which by watchful observance he tried to discover — whether Hope's marriage had been happy.

"You can't think what a cosie couple we are," continued little Mrs. Reay. "Kenneth wouldn't eat his dinner without having me to look at him — no, not for his life!"

"Indeed!"

"And as for staying at home, I do not believe he has spent one evening out of the house — at least away from me — ever since we were married!"

Hope sighed — almost imperceptibly — and then some chance brought up for the hundredth time the only subject which made her face look not merely peaceful but radiant — her baby-boy.

It is a sign contrary to God's ordinance, and in itself always betokening sad mysteries — when love for her children — not her husband — is evidently the strongest devotion and the keenest happiness of a young wife's heart.

Before leaving, Tinie began to plan all sorts of future meetings — her affectionate spirit made warmer still by its own full content, seemed running over with tenderness towards Hope and Hope's child; — except that in the latter case was a shadowing of the lightest possible jealousy for her friend's having attained one step of honour and glory before herself. Still, she comported herself with all possible benevolence towards the infantile Master Walter.

"You must come and spend a long day with us — baby, nurse, and all. We'll find room for them some-

where — and except for that little improvement our meeting will be quite like old times — so pleasant! Will it not, brother?"

"To us — if pleasant to Mrs. Ulverston."

This was the first time he had called her by her married name. It sounded unnatural to both. Nevertheless, she made no observation but let it pass, as if conscious that it must be so.

"I shall be delighted to come. What say you, Baby?" added she, in her playful caressing of the child, who had made his appearance again in all the glory of a white frock and pink bows. "How will Baby like going a-visiting? He has never done such a thing in his life, and I am sure his mamma has scarcely ever been out since she was married."

"How strange! I heard — through Edmund I think — how Mr. Ulverston was at Paris, Rome, and Florence — in the very midst of all gay society. Did he never take you with him?"

The young wife's cheek flushed painfully.

"Not always — I did not wish; manners are so different abroad, you know. Well, must he really come then — my baby Walter?" added she suddenly, as if to prevent more questionings. But she could not prevent the quick-witted Tinie from lifting her eyebrows and glancing to Ninian with a mysterious air, as she whispered apart,

"I wouldn't change husbands, after all."

But feminine curiosity was too deeply implanted in the little lady's breast for even her brother's warning eye to restrain her.

"Is not Mr. Ulverston very proud

she, as Hope stood tossing her treasure and talking to it rather than to her guests.

She answered "Yes," and continued her play.

"Of course he is," added Lady Ulverston, who seemed very fond of the little fellow. "With his fortune, anybody might envy him such a son and heir. The boy will be Sir Walter too, some of these days, when my poor husband and his own papa are both gone."

"I remember Mr. Ulverston's saying something about a title in the family, but he gave no particulars, or I have forgotten them. So he was heir to a baronetcy?" pursued Tinie, who was blest with a most inquiring mind.

"My poor Sir Peter was the right heir; but his father thought he was dead, or wished him so, and adopted a nephew, his half-brother's son, who was —"

Hope turned round with quiet dignity — "My dear Lady Ulverston, I think my husband would rather speak himself about these family matters than have them talked over in his absence."

"Indeed, I wouldn't vex him then. He has been most kind to Sir Peter — and I'm sure is quite welcome to his uncle's property — and my husband, poor old man! won't keep him out of the title long."

Ninian had listened to all this gossip — that is, he heard it — but it scarcely passed into his apprehension, for he was watching Hope's smiles and gestures with her boy, and thinking that in this tie at least seemed sufficient joy to fill her whole soul. Suddenly she paused at the sound of carriage-wheels stopping at the gate. Her colour changed slightly, and her face had a look similar to one Ninian had seen years before, when Mr. Ansted came down the avenue at The Gowans.

"Who can that be?" said Lady Ulverston, running to the window. "It is not the doctor, who was with Sir Peter an hour ago; and we know no one else in London. Who can it be?"

"It is Mr. Ulverston," said Hope. She gave her baby into the nurse's arms, and went out to meet her husband.

"Well — he *is* a flash of lightning," cried Tinie, in some trepidation. "Goodness, brother, how very unpleasant! What will we do?"

"We will wait here."

He said no more, but stood smothering the fierce conflict that was raging within him — determined to stay and meet the issue. He was conscious of no wrong, yet remembering their last meeting, it was a most trying position for the husband's declared adversary to be found here in friendly relations with the wife. Still, the cause of their enmity was a secret that for his own honour's sake Mr. Ulverston would not choose to betray. Perhaps, considering all things, he might even wish to preserve outward civility. If so, Ninian resolved that no act of his should wound Hope's feelings by producing external warfare between her old friend and the man she had married.

The brother and sister waited in the drawing-room for a quarter of an hour, a space interminable, but broken by the frequent entrance of Lady Ulverston, who seemed to have a great reverence for her husband's cousin; and who kept entreating of them not to go without seeing him.

At last the door opened and Mr. Ulverston entered; his wife, very quiet and pale, leaning on his arm. Ninian looked at them, once and no more. It was a sight that

a year ago would have been almost maddening; but his spirit was calmer now. He only stood upright, a little more rigid and cold, waiting to see how Hope's husband would meet him.

A moment's pause decided that question. Mr. Ulverston's eye met his, and sank. For some cause or other he evidently feared to be on ill terms with Ninian Græme. He dropped his wife's arm — carelessly, as a man would treat no other woman but a wife who had ceased to charm — and crossed the room.

"You are welcome. Any of Mrs. Ulverston's friends will always be welcome to my house."

He touched the hand which he had once refused. Ninian would gladly have never touched his more; but did so for Hope's sake.

A little of brief conversation passed — chiefly compliments to Mrs. Reay on her marriage — and then the visit terminated.

Tinie waited until she had got outside the gate and then poured out her feelings upon her silent brother.

"Well, she keeps her secrets to herself, poor thing! and perhaps it is all the better. But I can see as far through a stone wall as most people; and, upon my word and honour, I'd rather starve with my Kenneth in a Highland hut than I would be Mrs. Ulverston. God help her!"

"Amen!" was Ninian's sole answer.

CHAPTER XII.

"Now, that is too bad, brother! You promised to stay a whole week longer; and here before two days are over you want to go back to the North! It's a positive shame."

Mr. Græme listened patiently to these vituperations, only shaking his head and repeating that he must go.

"But why? Are you not quite independent of that stupid office now that you have taken a partner? Don't you deserve a holiday? And I am sure you need one; you are not half such a stout, hearty individual as you used to be. I could almost fancy you getting old."

"Well — so I will be — and you too some day, Mrs. Christina. If I look ill now, put it down to the effect of your London air, and let me run away."

"Ah, but wait and go with us! Please, do!" said the little matron, in her coaxing way. "There's Hope coming this week, poor child! And Mr. Forsyth! — Unless you stay and help me, what will I do with John Forsyth? I can't tease him now — he quite frightens me. What on earth could have made him come to London?"

"He wanders about everywhere, but I did not know he was here, until Kenneth and I met him this morning. However, we can learn all when he comes to night."

But when Mr. Forsyth did come, his manner was

sufficient to discountenance any curious inquiries. It was strange how a youth so gentle could have hardened into such a man — grave, severe, at times even forbidding. Little Mrs. Reay shrank into silence and a corner, whence she never emerged until their early tea — the social Scotch tea, which the Professor loved; after which, Mr. Forsyth rose to leave.

"I will walk with you — I am going out too," said Ninian, anxious to have a quiet talk with his old friend.

"Where are you going? You surely might stay with us this evening, brother?" was Tinie's plaint. It was unanswered; for Mr. Græme did not choose to explain what was his intended errand — to the theatre, in hopes of once more meeting Mrs. Armadale.

By tacit consent between the brothers, Rachel's secret had been safely kept. None of the family knew that the actress Mrs. Armadale was their old acquaintance Rachel Armstrong. Some vague scheme Ninian had had, in which the gentle Lindsay was to be a redeeming angel to this poor woman — poor and desolate amidst all her glory, as every woman is whose heart-riches are lost or crumbled into dust. But second thoughts showed the impossibility of any meeting points between the meek-spirited and timid Lindsay, or Tinie, the wife of a stanch, strict Presbyterian — and the young actress. Mr. Græme at last determined to let things rest as they were, only never again to lose sight of Rachel. She, deadened as she was to every kind of sympathy or friendship, seemed perfectly indifferent on the subject.

It was a curious coincidence that on this night he should be walking with John Forsyth. Once even, as they came in the neighbourhood of the theatre, they

approached Rachel's very door. Continually they passed by great play-bills, with her name — large-lettered — staring them in the face. Once, by some unaccountable sympathy, it seemed to catch John Forsyth's notice, and Ninian, to his great surprise, saw the young minister stop suddenly, and bend his stern eye to con over a play-bill. Not less strange was his abrupt question —

"Whereabouts is that place?"

"What place? Do you mean the — Theatre?"

"Yes."

"It is close by. Indeed, to tell the truth — which I am not ashamed of, for whatever you may think, I consider there is no harm in a good play — I was going there to-night."

"I will go with you."

Ninian looked at him with undisguised astonishment. "What, have you changed your opinions? Have you found out that a theatre is not quite such a den of wickedness as you supposed?"

"I think, as ever, that it is the very entrance-gate of hell; but I would go even there to pluck a soul out of the devil's clutches."

"You speak strangely. What do you mean, John?"

"That I am going into that foul place — I, a minister of God — just as I go in all the foul places of the earth, to save souls."

A conjecture, possible yet most improbable, struck Ninian. He said, with great earnestness, "I rarely pry into other men's affairs, but I wish you would explain to me your reasons for this?"

Forsyth pointed to the name of Mrs. Armadale. "Have you ever seen that woman?"

"Yes!" replied Ninian, watching him closely, and

marvelling whether by any chance he had penetrated the secret. "She is a great actress, as probably you have heard."

"I? What are such worldly vanities to me? But I have lately discovered that there was among the Durham play-actors a woman named Armadale, who seemed somewhat less wicked or more sorrowful than the rest. It might have been she who ever since has sent me money for my almsgivings. With that chance, for months past I have been seeking her out, that perhaps by my ministry it may please God to redeem a soul from hell."

"And what course do you intend to pursue?"

"I will go to the play-house — I have been in viler places than that ere now; I will scan the woman's face closely, as I have learnt to look into human faces. There, behind all her paint and gewgaws, I shall read her heart. Ay, I shall be able to do it, for God has strangely given me this power," persisted the enthusiast.

"And then?"

"If I trace one look of misery — one hope of penitence — I will seek her out through the lowest deeps of iniquity. She called herself a 'sinner,' and she showed charity, 'which covers a multitude of sins.' The devil shall not have that woman's soul!"

He turned round, his eyes gleaming with a light that seemed half-devotion, half-frenzy. (Yet, Heaven knows! there has been hardly a prophet, either of ancient or modern ages, of whom it was not sometimes said, "He is a fanatic," or "He is mad.")

Ninian looked at his friend, much moved. "John, to that I answer Amen! and I know more of her than you."

"You do know her, then? Is she young, or has she

grown old and hardened in sin? Is there any hope for her? How can I get access to her, and make her hear words of truth and life?"

"In no way. She is not what you suppose. She is a poor young creature — innocent in God's sight, but who never can be happy in this world. You could do her no good. Renounce this wild scheme; indeed, it were best you did."

John Forsyth smiled, with a sarcasm new to his character. "Ay, that is what the world always says. 'Wild schemes,' 'mad schemes,' are they! when they are for saving souls. Still, I did not expect this from Ninian Græme."

"You are not going to drop my arm, John?"

"Yes. You take your way — I mine. Nothing shall hinder me. With you, or without you, I shall go to that house of the devil's rearing to-night."

"Listen to me — for old friendship's sake you must!" said Ninian, alarmed for the result of such a step. "Walk round this quiet square, and let me reason with you. You do not know Mrs. Armadale."

"No, nor care to know. Enough for me that she has a soul to save. God would not have thrown her in my path had He not meant me to be His messenger towards her. See her I must and will."

"You have seen her many times." John Forsyth started. "If she sent you that money, it was because she knew to whom she sent it. She always honoured you, though she made you suffer once. Have you forgotten?"

He stood still. The glow of enthusiasm passed from his features; they hardened slowly, though they were turned full upward in the light of the evening sky.

"I hardly like to speak about these things," continued Ninian; "but you see I must. Cannot you guess the truth? This Mrs. Armadale — it is a false name, such as play-actors frequently use — her real name is —"

"Say it. Do not be afraid."

"Rachel Armstrong."

The young minister shivered, his head fell on his breast. Once his lips moved, as if he was praying. But a minute's count included and ended all.

"Heaven did not bring me here in vain, then," said he in the hard tones which had become habitual to him. "There is still a soul to be saved, even my cousin Rachel's. Let us go."

And with a will that there was evidently no changing, he led the way back towards the theatre. Ninian had no resource but to follow; trusting that his own influence and that of the woman whom John Forsyth had once loved, would keep the religious enthusiast within reasonable bounds.

It is a truth, strange, even sorrowful to think of, but nevertheless a truth, that love can come to an end. That is, love of a certain kind, which is frequently nothing more than the idealisation of selfish passion. Under some strong counteracting influence — pride, remorse, or self-contempt — this feeling can die out of a man's breast; perhaps even out of a woman's, though that is a harder thing. Sometimes holier and higher aims will extinguish it, as the sun puts out a fire; else it will slowly burn itself into dead ashes, which neither the same hand nor any other can ever rekindle more.

Such ending — either one or both — had come to John Forsyth's love; the only passion which this man, who seemed made, as some men are, not for himself

but to work out a destiny — was ever fated to know. Ninian saw from the first glance which John Forsyth cast towards Rachel, that all passion was dead in his heart — that he looked on her as he did on any other woman — ay, and as he would look on every woman until the day of his death. He was a man fitted to be neither lover, husband, nor father, but to go forth, one of God's pilgrims and servants, carrying neither staff nor scrip — giving to friends no payment save a "Peace be unto you" — and leaving for foes no curse except the dust shaken from the feet.

It was a strange thing to see this man sitting there — young still — but from his youth the more severely hard. He scarcely spoke to Ninian, but sat upright — sometimes looking forward at the stage — sometimes casting his eyes down, until startled into attention by Rachel's voice.

The play to-night was not Edmund's, which had already died out of the theatrical world's brief memory, but a stock tragedy — Milman's "Fazio." Ninian suddenly remembered how one night at The Gowans Rachel had in sport acted a scene from it with Edmund. She had liked the play then; perhaps it was one of the relics of the time when everything she liked was of love's teaching. From the little Mr. Græme knew of the tragedy, he felt that there was something of its heroine — ay, and her story, too — in Rachel herself. He did not wonder to hear the people around him say that *Bianca* was one of Mrs. Armadale's best parts.

Nevertheless, her first act was not good. There was no grace — no beauty in her playfulness. Alas, the element of happiness was not in her! But in the second act, when the wife's jealousy begins to dawn, the great

tragic actress was herself again — her true self — as she never was anywhere but on the stage. That was her life and its reality. All passions, all tendernesses, dammed up eternally in her woman's heart, rushed to swell the tide of her genius. What seemed acting was her true self hidden under varied phases of character; but in its depths still one and the same.

"Is she not grand?" said Ninian, when between the acts the dropscene fell.

"I know not and care not. But she must be snatched from the burning," was John Forsyth's sole answer.

Ninian, hopeless of conversation, began to look round the house. His idly-wandering eye was soon fixed: it seemed as if fate were heaping up more strange accidents in this one night. Opposite to him, bowing and smiling from a private box, was a face he knew — the plain, honest countenance of Lady Ulverston. And from behind the curtain he saw brown curls droop: Hope too must surely be there. Shortly there came a message from her to himself and Mr. Forsyth, whom she had recognised, requesting that they would both go round to her box.

"Who is she?" inquired the young minister absently.

"My sister's friend, Miss Ansted, now Mrs. Ulverston. You must surely remember her. You saw Mr. Ulverston also, the day the twins were married."

"Ulverston? I had forgotten the name, but I remember the man. He is a guileful man — I discerned it in his face."

"Nay — you must not judge so harshly."

"I judge not: I only see according to the power given me. Again I say, the man I saw is an evil man, and will come to an evil end."

"God forbid — for her sake!" said Ninian, hastily, for the fanaticism was so earnest that it seemed half-supernatural. "But as you perceive Mr. Ulverston is not in the box, you can have no objection to come with me?"

For, intending to start the next day, Ninian had determined to go and say good-by to Hope, then and there. It would be easy to do so in the theatre, and after then he would take care not to see that face any more. Had it been a happy face — as a young wife's should be — he had not feared to meet it; but now, pale and clouded, it roused in him feelings approaching hatred towards the man who had stolen his treasure from him, perhaps only to cast it away.

Just, and honourable, and virtuous man though he was, Ninian felt that — seeing there was no need for him to run in the way of misery — it would be better all things considered, tacitly to let this be the last time of his meeting Mrs. Ulverston.

There was no one in the box except the two ladies, and a boy, Lady Ulverston's nephew, whom she had made her messenger. As Ninian entered, Hope turned round, her listless look brightening.

"I am so glad to see you! Who would have thought we should meet here? Where is Tinie?"

"At home. The Professor does not like theatres, so his good little wife stays away to please her husband."

"And Mrs. Ulverston to please *her* husband goes," interrupted the elder lady; "when all the while I think she is longing to be back with little Walter."

The young mother smiled. "Nay, I am quite well satisfied. It was very kind of him to take this box for

us. He will join us soon, I should think, and will be so pleased to see you, Mr. Græme."

She evidently knew nothing of the enmity between them. Ninian wondered what strong motive could constrain Ulverston to desire to keep up an outward civility with one whom he must secretly hate.

"You too will stay, Mr. Forsyth?" continued Hope, extending her greeting to him; "I have always a warm welcome for my Scottish friends."

Forsyth appeared indifferent to where he was, and so they stayed.

The play proceeded. Hope seemed little interested therein. In her was nothing of the *Bianca* nature; she only looked with a kind of childlike wonder and pity on the struggles of the passionately-loving jealous wife. Perhaps, in herself the first feeling being absent, she could not understand the second. Sometimes, however, she sighed, and her thoughts apparently wandered, especially in the scene where *Bianca* keeps her solitary midnight watch for the husband who revels abroad. Perchance she herself had known many such weary vigils. But, what was rather surprising, except for the very slight acquaintance that had ever existed between Rachel and herself and the thorough change effected by theatrical show — Hope seemed unconscious that she had ever before seen Mrs. Armadale.

In the middle of the play Mr. Ulverston came into the box. His entrance was quiet, for the house was all hushed in attention to the actress's great scene, when *Bianca* accuses her faithless husband before the judges. Rachel was standing, her face turned from the audience, and veiled.

"Is that Mrs. Armadale?" whispered Ulverston. "She

is to be a second Siddons, I hear; but I have no faith in these theatrical prodigies. However, she seems a fine woman — very!" He came forward, and leaning behind his wife's chair, looked carelessly at the stage.

But when *Bianca* turned round, her face still covered with that aerial gauze which is comically enough deemed sufficient for all theatrical wraps and disguises — the "*nil admirari*" haughtiness of the young man's look changed into keen observation. He knitted his brows: suddenly took the play-bill from Hope's hand, and scanned it closely. But at that instant Mrs. Armadale's acting absorbed all attention.

She stood facing the audience, in the dead pause of silence with which *Bianca* waits the entrance of her accused husband. Her large eyes — open and glassy — were seen to wander over the theatre. Suddenly her face was crossed by a spasm stronger even than *Bianca's* acted despair. She staggered and sank — not insensible, but crouching down, her head turned over her shoulder, her eyes fixed with a frightful glare — on the *Fazio* of the night apparently, though Ninian thought that gaze seemed to pass beyond, even to the side-box where they all were.

It was grand acting — almost as fine as nature! The audience broke into an awe-stricken murmur. Even the careless critic Mr. Ulverston drew back appalled.

There was a pause on the stage, for the next speech was *Bianca's;* and the actress, in the perfection of her acting, seemed incapable of utterance. A shiver ran over all her limbs; then she rose upright, and her voice was heard once more. It sounded hollow — unnatural. Once or twice she paused in her speech, as if the words were floating away from her memory — as was so

natural in the poor maddened *Bianca!* All the awful inspiration of her genius came upon her. Never was there acting so vividly, fearfully real.

Even Hope was moved at last. When the scene ended she sighed deeply.

"That woman terrifies me; the more so as now and then her look seems familiar. I am sure I have seen her before somewhere."

"Impossible," said the husband sharply. "You are always taking foolish fancies into your head, Mrs. Ulverston."

Hope coloured painfully, and was silent.

"Indeed, my dear," observed Lady Ulverston, "you must be mistaken. You never could have had anything to do with actresses."

"No. Perhaps it was some chance likeness that struck me," said the yielding Hope. "Most certainly, I never knew any one of the name of Armadale."

"It is a false name," sternly interposed John Forsyth, who had hitherto sat back in silence. "I at least will abet no lies. The woman is my cousin, Rachel Armstrong."

Mr. Ulverston started, and then apologised. "You there, Mr. Forsyth? I beg your pardon. But who would have thought to see you in a theatre, claiming cousinship with an actress! Is it really so? Come, explain."

"Let *me* explain," interposed Ninian, lest the sarcastic tone of Mr. Ulverston should rouse Forsyth into more betrayals. "I know Rachel Armstrong. She is indeed Mr. Forsyth's cousin — a Scotswoman, from the Border. Her life has been strange and sad."

"Very instructive, no doubt; but we are not curious

to hear a theatrical biography," said Mr. Ulverston, hastily. "At least, my wife is not; and for myself I am quite tired of such things. I shall go and have a cigar." — He made his escape almost immediately, and appeared in the box no more.

There was but little pause ere Rachel again came on the stage. Throughout the rest of the play she acted with almost superhuman grandeur. In her mad scene she seemed a perfect Pythoness of despair. Her curses against her rival, the exulting ferbcity that glittered in her eyes, made the gentle Hope shudder; especially, as almost the moment ere those eyes closed in *Bianca's* mimic death, their glare seemed to reach and almost confront her own.

When the curtain fell Mrs. Ulverston drew back, pale with excitement. "I was always afraid of Rachel Armstrong. No wonder! — She is an awful woman."

"And yet a most unhappy and broken-hearted one," said Ninian, in a low voice.

"Is she? Then surely you, who can do so much good to every one, should you not do good to her?"

"No one can. Some griefs are incurable. Of such is hers."

"Poor soul! Could you not bring her to me, Mr. Græme? I could at least be kind to her and comfort her. Indeed, I would try!"

Ninian's answer was stopped by John Forsyth's abrupt summons: "Now, will you come? Show me where I can see my cousin Rachel."

There was no withholding him, and Ninian, dreading any evil result, determined to accompany him. He bade good night to the two ladies, who were left in the charge of their boy-cavalier.

"Mr. Ulverston will return, of course?"

"I think not," said Hope. "But we can go home alone."

Ninian hesitated slightly. "I would come back for you —"

"Indeed, you must not. Only come and see me to-morrow, just to say good-by. You will promise?"

"I promise," said he, finding that resistance would appear strange; and so he departed.

They learnt in the theatre that Mrs. Armadale, overcome by her exertions that night, had been very ill. One of the women about the stage even said she heard shrieks and groans issue from the dressing-room, whither the celebrated actress had crawled between the acts.

"You see what an arduous, dreadful life she leads. It is cruel to see her to-night, Forsyth. What do you mean to say to her?"

"To warn, counsel, threaten her; so that she may turn from this way of vanity and sin. It would be my duty towards any human being; how much more towards one of my own blood. And if I save her soul," he added in a lower voice, "will it not be the best atonement for that madness by which I once perilled my own, when I forgot my holy calling for the sake of earthly desires; and losing them, could almost have turned to 'curse God and die.' But He saved me — and I am here."

Talking thus, Forsyth and Ninian walked up and down in the open air behind the theatre — strange scene for such a conversation! At last, seeing no resource, Mr. Græme led the way towards Rachel's home. They had hardly reached the door, when they saw her

following, walking slowly and seeming to rest on her little old servant, who was soothing her like a child.

"Who is that? Stand off, sir, if it be you!" cried the old woman's shrill voice; — but she grew pacified on seeing it was Ninian. "It is only Mr. Græme. Come in — my mistress wants you."

"Yes — I want you," repeated Rachel, feebly, snatching his hand and leading him in. John Forsyth, whether by his own hesitation or by Jane Sedley's contrivance, was left without the door.

Rachel sank down, and her servant unfastened her cloak and hood. The old woman was weeping; but Rachel herself was apparently without emotion, though all her face was one pallor. She spoke at last.

"You were at the theatre to-night — I saw you. Who were you with?"

"John Forsyth."

"I know that; I saw him too. But with you in the box were others — a lady — a gentleman. Their names? Quick — quick!"

"There was Mr. Ulverston, an acquaintance of mine whom you may have heard of at The Gowans."

Her hands clutched one another impatiently. "Go on — who else?"

"A young lady whom you probably recognised; Miss Ansted — now Mrs. Ulverston. Her husband stood behind her."

"Close? Leaning over her chair? Was *his* name Ulverston? And she was his wife?"

The words hissed from between her lips; her eyes were like two burning fires. A horrible suspicion burst on Ninian's mind.

"Rachel — did you ever see this man before? do you know anything of him?

"Did I *say* anything?" And she set her teeth together, as if determined that the grave itself should not be more silent than she.

"Will you not tell me? Is he —?"

"You said he was your friend — Mr. Ulverston. What have I said more?" answered Rachel, with a ghastly smile.

"Nothing; but I guess what you suspect. It cannot be true, — God forbid!"

"And so he is married to little Hope Ansted! And his name is Ulverston! A friend of yours too? I would like to meet him, Mr. Græme."

The deadly, sarcastic coldness of her speech could have but one meaning — one purpose — revenge. She stood, a living, a real *Bianca*, ready for any deed that brought down her vengeance upon the head on which had once rested her passionate love.

Without need of her confession, Ninian discerned all. Like lightning, a thousand confirmatory proofs flashed upon his mind. He felt that he must have been mad or blind not to have long before guessed the truth; — that Rachel's betrayer was no other than Mr. Ulverston.

"Oh my poor Hope — my unhappy child!" groaned Ninian. And the next thought showed him that for this wretchedness there was no cure. The discovery came too late. The deceit practised upon Rachel could not in the least affect Ulverston's union with a legally-married wife. All now left was to save Hope from the knowledge of what a villain her husband had been.

How could Ninian do this? While he paused, the

wronged and desperate woman stood beside him, her relentless purpose gleaming in her eyes.

"Well! — Are you planning this pleasant meeting? I tell you, I wish to be introduced to your friend Mr. Ulverston."

"Wherefore? Do not try to deceive me, Rachel — you cannot. I understand all. What good will it do you again to meet this — this villain?"

Was it one latent lingering of her olden love that made Rachel start to hear this word so applied? "'Villain!' it is a hard name, especially as given to *your friend.*"

"He is not my friend; he never was. It was a chance acquaintance merely. Would to Heaven that —"

Ninian stopped. He had yet strength and wisdom to control himself, nor lay bare his own life's secrets to this woman, who stood, hard as a rock externally, but within — Now only he began to guess what a fiery cauldron was seething there!

"Rachel, what are you going to do? Rather — what have you power to do?"

"Anything!" For a moment's space the torrent of passion was let loose, and chained again. But that one moment showed she was indeed a woman who could do "anything."

"Govern yourself," said Ninian sternly, for he felt he must not waver.

"Govern myself? — I saw him in the middle of the play — I went on to the end. Grandly, too, did I not? I am, as people say, a good actress!" she answered, with slow, fierce irony.

There was a pause between these two conflicting wills, and then Rachel returned to the charge.

"Once more, Mr. Græme, will you bring me face to face with your friend? Or shall I have to seek him in that pleasant home-circle of his, with his wife that he loves — his lawful married wife, Heaven bless her! — No, Heaven curse her!"

Low and bitterly smiling was the blessing, but the curse rose laden with an unfathomable burden of hate.

"Take heed what you do," Ninian cried, grasping her arm. "You cannot alter what is past. You are not his wife, and she is; but she never wronged you. He only is guilty — doubly so — towards both. Still, if you accuse him, you will only cast dishonour on yourself, make her miserable, and yet not punish him. So are such things judged in the world."

"The world! The wise, virtuous, generous world!"

"— You will not do it, Rachel? You will not bring down misery on that innocent girl?"

"She is happy, then? They are very happy together? They love one another — do they? She sits by his fireside — perhaps this very minute — watching him — smiling at him — kissing him — ah!"

And Rachel gasped as if, low as her voice was, each word suffocated her. Then recovering herself, she stood up once more, confronting Ninian.

"You will think I am acting *Bianca* over again for your private amusement. A pity we have no audience here! That pretty Hope, for instance, who once looked so terrified when I acted in the parlour at The Gowans! How would she bear a little reality now?"

Ninian saw that with all the might of his influence he must struggle for the mastery over this woman's furious will, or else the slender thread on which hung the peace of Hope's married life — its peace, for something

told him there was in it little happiness — would be broken at once. Her pure nature would never recover the shock of such a discovery. Better let her go dreaming on in a half-twilight existence that was neither love nor its opposite, neither joy nor pain, than be roused thoroughly to despise her husband — the father of her child.

Still, he persisted; determined either to soothe, warn, or entreat Rachel into silence.

"Let us talk plain reason," said he. "Supposing all were disclosed, and Mr. Ulverston were renounced by his wife, or she by him, what were the result? Would you return to him again, or force him to take you, and make you — not his wife — that could never be; but — you know what? That is all you could be, even if he loved you still, as you love him."

"— I, love him? — If he were lying on that floor before me, and, dying, asked me for a forgiving hand, I would do — thus." She turned away, and knitted her hands so tightly together that the blue marks of the fingers were left in the flesh.

"What do you desire then?"

"His punishment."

"I tell you over again, you cannot compass that. All you can do is against poor Hope. You have not the heart? You could not harm the child I loved — my adopted sister? You little know how tenderly she spoke of you — how, recognising you —"

"She did recognise me! He will hear her speak of me!" muttered Rachel.

"— How, thinking you were lonely or unhappy, she wished to do you good — asked me to bring you to her house."

"I will go," said Rachel; and her voice, which in all this time had scarcely risen above a breath, became almost inaudible. "I will go and see his wife."

"What are you saying to yourself?"

"Nothing." And after that, talk as Ninian might, he won no further answer. She scarcely seemed to notice him, but gradually sank into a chair, where she sat, white as a statue, with nothing of life or motion about her, except the lights which the lamp cast over the heavy waves of red-brown hair.

"You had better leave her, I think," said Mrs. Sedley, at last venturing to interfere. "She will sit in that way whole days sometimes. Go away, pray! No one understands my poor mistress but me."

Ninian thought it best to obey, knowing that as yet Hope was safe, since Rachel was not even aware of her abode.

"Good night! You will let me come and see you to-morrow? And for all I have said forgive me. You would, if you knew!" And he looked with a strange pity and compassion on this young creature, whose life had been crushed by the same hand that came between himself and his happiness. "Let us be at peace with one another, my poor Rachel!"

She bent her head without speaking; and Ninian left her.

At the moment he remembered John Forsyth.

"You will not find him," Jane Sedley answered to his question. "He came to the door, looking very queer, so I told him you were gone, and that Mrs. Armadale would not see him. Keep him away, Mr. Græme, for

the love of Heaven! Among you all, you'll drive my poor mistress off her head again."

It seemed almost probable; for as Ninian left the door, he might have heard from the room within the unhappy woman muttering to herself, first softly, then rising almost into a shriek, the words whose intent involved the last power of collected reason:

"I will go and see his wife! — I will go and see his wife!"

CHAPTER XIII.

It was yet early in the forenoon when Ninian found himself on the Brompton Road. He was impelled thither by the fear of some quick-coming misery on her whom he would once have shielded like a pet lamb in his bosom from every shadow of harm.

Let no one say that passion is unconquerable. It can never be so in a pure heart. Inevitable necessity — the stern sense of right — the will at last bent to that Holier Will which maps out human life — can in time crush down the individual longing that would wholly appropriate to itself what seems fairest both to its spiritual and visual eye. Yet nothing can obliterate tenderness — that hallowed lingering of memory which seems to say, "Thou art not mine, — I have ceased to hope or even wish it so; but no one can ever be to me in thy stead, and at any time I would give my life to pour out blessings upon thee and thine."

With this sort of feeling, strangely intense though calm, Ninian went to see Mrs. Ulverston.

His mind had changed much since the previous day. As soon as the real threatening of trouble rose up against her, it overshadowed and suppressed every restless strife in his own breast. He began to think that the desire or need to fly must have had its root in some feeling, selfish or erring. During the long night of wakefulness, he resolved that at present it was best and right for him to stay, if in any way he might control Rachel,

and ward off the threatening results of the discovery she had made.

He found Hope sitting alone with her baby. Happy mother! she wanted nothing else to cheer and comfort her. The maternal feeling reigned paramount in her heart, as it does in that of some gentle and tender women — an all-sufficient consolation for every other want. She looked so pretty — so sweet — so young — lying on the little yellow damask couch, with one knee raised as a well-poised throne for the baby-king. He was lording it in grand style — was the illustrious Walter; his face, wonderfully bright and intelligent for such a young infant — dimpling in thorough satisfaction, doubtless at the taste of his mother's dainty finger, which he was biting in rare glee. How she laughed — the happy one! — and how she let him bite away, and pull her ribbons, and tear her curls, inflicting severe bodily suffering — the little tyrant! — who after all was only punished with kisses.

Upon this picture Ninian's entrance broke.

"Ah, how good of you to come so early. You will stay an hour or two — nay, you must. Shall I send baby away?"

But somehow she looked as if that would be a great act of self-denial, so Mr. Græme prevented it. Besides, he had an inward consciousness that it was better for him to see her thus, as unlike as possible to Hope Ansted — Hope, his "child."

Therefore he took his place near, while Mrs. Ulverston sat with Walter laid across her lap, rocking him softly, her little hands — they seemed the same pretty hands as of old, except for the wedding-ring — beating

a gentle tattoo upon the shoulders of his infant majesty, who at last condescended to sleep.

And these two innocent ones — the mother not less innocent than the child — belonged to that wicked man, and were the rivals of the poor maddened Rachel! For a moment Ninian could hardly bear to look at them; again there seemed to ring in his ears the curse of the wronged woman. A terror seized him — lest, ripe for anything, she might visit her wrongs upon these two.

He asked, so suddenly that Mrs. Ulverston seemed surprised, how long they were going to stay in London?

"A year, I thought; but this morning my husband told me he had changed his mind, and that we should leave soon, either for some sea-side place, or else for the Continent. I do not quite like it; I would wish to teach my boy to be happy in a quiet English home." And looking on the little sleeper, she half sighed, as with that dim foreboding of the future which all mothers feel.

"Will this plan soon be settled?" said Ninian, thinking with some relief that Hope would probably have left London before Rachel discovered her abode.

"Mr. Ulverston said he would tell me more to-night. He has gone to town earlier than usual; but I believe some urgent business called him. He will doubtless return before you leave."

She did not speak about her husband again. For nearly an hour she sat with the child asleep on her lap, talking of old times — they seemed so far back now! — of her girlish days among the Græme family, or of a still happier theme, the future of her boy.

"I hope he will grow up a great man, and a good

man — almost as good as you," said she, turning round to Mr. Græme with an affectionate smile. "For though he does not bear your Christian name, as I wished, you must always remember that he is your little nephew by adoption; and whenever his mamma wishes to hold out a good example, she will tell him to try and be like his dear Uncle Ninian."

Ninian smiled, but made no reply. He thought, hearing her thus frankly confess the honour in which she held him, how bitterly he had been mistaken once — and what a difference there was between the heart-flood "I love," and the clear ice-drops "I esteem." A difference which has driven many a soul mad ere now! unless Heaven mercifully puts into their hands the cup of peace and water of life, so that they drink and thirst after earthly waters no more.

"I must really talk about other things than my boy, or you will consider my conversation quite stupid," said the young mother. "And first I want to hear of Rachel Armstrong — Mrs. Armstrong, I think you used to call her. Is she a widow?"

The simple, natural question struck Ninian like a thunderbolt. He stammered out some answer concerning "an unhappy marriage," then remembered that this was a false expression — when there was no marriage at all. At last, finding that Hope noticed his confusion, and that some faint colour was beginning to tinge her cheek, he took refuge in the only real stronghold any one can use — the truth.

"I cannot answer your question without telling you her whole history, which I have no right to do. Enough, that it has been very sad — but there is nothing in it

for which she need blush in the sight of Heaven, or of any generous-hearted man or woman."

"If you say so, it is enough. And you know all her story? My husband was asking me if I thought you did. He seems rather displeased that we — that is, you and I, and your sisters — should have known Mrs. Armstrong at all: he will not let me go and see her, as I desired."

"You asked him, then?" And Ninian could scarcely bear to look at the guileless, deceived wife.

"Yes; I would have gone to-day — but, of course, against Mr. Ulverston's wish it is impossible."

"Quite — do not think of it. Promise me you will not!"

"I believe," said Hope, with the lightest possible tinge of dignity, "there is little need for me to promise not to disobey my husband."

"True, true — pardon me."

At this moment there was a ring at the hall-bell, startling the child out of its sleep. The little fellow stretched his arms, and set up a loud cry.

"I must run away with him. Mr. Ulverston does not like crying babies — no papas do. Come, hide the wee face, and away with mamma, my darling."

Ninian wound up his self-command to meet the man to whom, now, his sense of repulsion was almost beyond control. When the door opened he saw — not him, but one the sight of whom he infinitely dreaded more — Rachel Armstrong. She was speaking to the servant:

"Mr. Ulverston is not at home — but that is no matter, I prefer seeing Mrs. Ulverston. Will you tell her I am here!"

"What name shall I say, ma'am?"

She hesitated a moment — she, who could claim no name! — and then gave that of "Mrs. Armadale."

The moment after, she perceived Ninian Græme.

"You here, so early! I thought my visit would have been the first," she said, meeting him with external composure. All the tempest of the previous night had sunk to a dead calm. He beheld in her merely Mrs. Armadale, — the finished actress, perfect in other *rôles* than that of the mimic stage. Her greeting was as easy as if they two had met on an every-day morning call — then she sat down, facing him.

She was, indeed, the very picture of that rare thing — "a lady." Her attire, all black — she never wore anything else when off the stage — was exquisite in taste, rich, yet plain. Beautiful her face was not, because nothing could change the coarse outlines of her mouth; but it was, as ever, a startling, weird-like, glorious face — worth all the mere prettinesses in the world. And then she had about her that rare charm, without which beauty itself is nothing — the inexplicable grace which, radiating from the genius within, surrounds the outward form as with an atmosphere of light. Such she looked — sitting in the home of the man who, humanly speaking, had been the creating influence of her life, and but for whom she might have been still a mere farmer's daughter on the Border-side.

Rachel lifted her veil far back from her face, and looked round.

"It is a pretty house," she said.

Her manner, so ruthless in its composure, struck Ninian with horror.

"Rachel," he answered, with an agitation he could not quite repress, "how can you try to deceive me thus?

What purpose have you in coming to this house, from which I had thought every womanly feeling would have kept you away?"

"My purpose? Cannot one lady visit another at her request? Ought I not to respond to the kind message you yourself brought me from Mrs. Ulverston?"

"I wish to Heaven I had never delivered it! But it is vain. Her husband forbids your meeting."

"Does he? — *her* husband. We shall see."

"Rachel!" cried Ninian, in despair, "if you have anything womanly in your heart, think what you do. You cannot punish him, he is too hardened. You can only destroy the peace of a young creature who never injured you. A mother too — you should have seen her a few minutes since, where you sit, her child in her arms." Rachel started and moved from the place. "Can you not feel for her?"

"How can I? Heaven saved me that shame, and denied me that comfort — I never had a child." And she ceased to answer Ninian, who at last turned from entreaties to the exercise of that authority he had once had over her, even in her maddest days.

"Mark me, Rachel; I have been a good friend to you. You trusted me, and I kept your confidence. I would have righted you if I could, but it was impossible. Nothing can redeem you in the world's sight; the more public your vengeance, the deeper your own ruin. Renounce this scheme, and I will guard you like a brother; follow it up — but no, you will not do that? You will take this warning, and act as a generous, Christian woman ought?"

"*You will,*" spoken as he spoke it, sounded like "*you must.*" Rachel's eyes fell, and there was an uneasy qui-

vering in her features. But at that moment Hope's sudden entrance put a bar upon all further reasoning. Ninian, thoroughly hopeless, could only stand by and watch the result.

She came forward — the gentle young matron — looking rather timid and confused. Rachel rose from her seat, and the two women stood face to face.

"Mrs. Armadale — or Mrs. —" said Hope, hesitating by what name to address her.

Rachel never answered. Her eyes were fixed piercingly upon her rival, as if drinking in every lineament of Hope's face — every line of her delicate form. So intent and fiery was the gaze, that the young creature began to colour sensitively.

"You know me then?" Hope said. "I remembered you." And she held out her hand.

Mechanically, Rachel touched it, and let it drop again as though it burnt her. She tried to speak, but her tongue seemed dried up. Hope looked surprised, and then, out of the soft compassion of her heart, she went up to Rachel and kissed her.

Either the act was too sudden for repulse, or else beneath those innocent eyes every vengeful passion was for the moment subdued — but Rachel was perfectly passive. At length, she found speech.

"Miss Ansted — Mrs. Ulverston I mean — I believe you wished to see me. I too was very anxious to see you. Therefore I procured your address and came; I hope not unwelcome?"

"Oh no — no!" cried Hope, forgetting the conjugal prohibition, until a glance towards Ninian brought it to her mind. She looked uneasy. Mr. Græme determined to take the chance of one bold act of truth-speaking.

"I was this moment telling Mrs. Armadale that Mr. Ulverston had expressed his objection to your visiting each other."

"Oh, hush!" whispered Hope, entreatingly. "It was only on account of her profession; he has some peculiar notions against the stage. But she must forgive his prejudices. They would cease at once, if he were only to know her."

"You think so?" said Rachel, with one of her fearful smiles. "Therefore, to try an experiment —"

"None shall be tried!" interposed Ninian. "I trust that my friend Rachel Armstrong has more good feeling and generosity. She will, I know, return to town at once with me."

"Now, Mrs. Ulverston, what say you? Will you turn me out of your house, as Mr. Græme persists in doing? Are you afraid lest my presence should read you a lesson in conjugal rebellion?"

"Oh no!" said Hope, touched with sympathy for the young actress, who despite the smiles which she forced to her lips, had changed gradually to a hue absolutely livid. Though she kept standing — upright and motionless.

"You must not go," continued Mrs. Ulverston, "you seem quite exhausted; but you shall rest here. I know my husband would wish it."

"Are you quite sure? Is he so generous? Or perhaps on your persuasion he will yield his prejudices, being, as I conclude, such a loving husband!"

Poor little Hope! She shrank confused and troubled before that keen gaze, which seemed to read her through. Apparently in the young wife's pained and hesitating

manner Rachel discerned some secret which struck her with triumph. She glanced towards Ninian.

"It would be a pity to make my unworthy self a subject of contention between a married couple so *loving*." She again laid a sarcastic emphasis on the word, and watched how Hope started, colouring deeply. "But I believe, nevertheless, if Mr. Ulverston found me here, I should be able to satisfy him as to the reasons and excuses for my visit."

"That is needless. It would be better for you to go," persisted Ninian.

"I will, if my old acquaintance Mrs. Ulverston desires it."

What could Hope do? Nothing, but what her gentle loving-kindness prompted, to a creature whom she knew to be unhappy and forlorn.

"You must stay," she said; "you shall rest for an hour or two, and take a walk round the garden; and besides," she added, with simple maternal vanity, "I should like to show you my baby-boy."

Ninian looked apprehensively at Rachel. But the latter, whatever were her emotions or her purposes, betrayed neither. She seemed determined to hover yet longer over her victim, and find out every heart-secret of the poor young wife before destroying her peace for ever.

"You are a proud mother, I see, Mrs. Ulverston. I should like to look at your boy. — Your only one?"

"Yes," said Hope, while she delightedly rang for the nurse and her treasure.

"You have not been married long, then?"

"A year and a half."

"You are Mr. Ulverston's first wife, of course?"

Hope looked surprised, even startled. Mr. Græme came forward: "Perhaps, Mrs. Armadale, as I happen to have been that young lady's *guardian*" — he imperceptibly marked the word — "and even now am unwilling quite to relinquish the name, — it would be as well if you were to catechise *me*."

His manner, though perfectly courteous, indicated that he would admit no contest. It silenced Rachel in spite of herself, for the moment. Further conversation was stopped by the advent of the baby.

The mother, now all smiling, took her beauty in her arms, and held him aloft for Mrs. Armadale's admiration. She, poor wretch! sat, clenching her hands upon the chair — her eyes, wild with unutterable agony, glaring upon the child — *his* child.

"Calm yourself, Rachel," whispered Ninian, as he passed her by. He knew, out of his own knowledge, something of her tortures now. They were but brief, for suddenly she rose.

"It is a beautiful boy — very beautiful."

"Would you like to hold him?" said the young mother, evidently feeling this offer to be the height of generosity.

Rachel seemed to recoil, as if from some horrible temptation. "No, no," she gasped. "Keep him from me. I might dash him — that is, let him fall, and he might be — killed, you know!" The mother shuddered. "Excuse me," continued Rachel, in her ordinary voice, "but I really know nothing about children."

"Ah!" sighed Hope, regarding with a pitying interest the young creature whom she deemed to be probably an unhappy and childless wife. And she hugged the little Walter closer to her breast.

"Let me look at him, though I shall not harm him," added Rachel as she composed her features into smiles. "Is he like his father?"

"I think not."

"No," said the other, fixedly examining the child, and speaking in an under tone. "It is not like him. The mouth is not his mouth; the eyes — they are full and blue, and his were deep-set, and dark — so dark!"

"What! have you ever seen my husband?"

"At the play. Mr. Ulverston was with you at the play, you know," Ninian said.

"Did you notice him so much, even though you were acting?" continued Hope, still turning to Mrs. Armadale. "He would be very much flattered, indeed."

"Would he? Tell him, then! Tell him I saw him, and that this pleasant sight half-induced me to come here to-day. But his wife need not be jealous. Ha, ha! Ask him if he thinks his wife need be jealous of me?"

Hope looked as if in her simplicity she did not quite fathom the jest, at which she, nevertheless, smiled.

"Tell him, too, that I have enjoyed my visit much — that it will delight me to pursue this acquaintance — that I hope ere long to be thoroughly known by him and his wife, and that I leave my benison on his child. There — take it, little — What is the child's name?"

"Walter."

"His father's, perhaps. Is it his father's?" And she drew her breath hard.

"No; my husband's Christian name is not half so pretty. He said — But there he is. He has come in by the garden. He will see us directly!"

And, much frightened, the wife looked at her forbidden guest.

"We will go at once. Come, Rachel," said Ninian, resolutely.

"I thank you; but it is too late now. I prefer to stay."

She kept her position, never wavering. She was half-concealed by Hope and the child; so that when Mr. Ulverston came up to the glass door, he at first only perceived that some lady was there. He came in, bowing and smiling, with that cheerful, frank, *dégagé* air which was peculiar to him. And then confronting him — rising up like an accusing spirit from beside his wife and child — he saw the countenance of Rachel Armstrong.

He would not have been man if at that sight he had not shrunk back and turned pale — pale with anger, the poor wife thought, and hastened to appease him.

"This is Mrs. Armadale — the Rachel Armstrong whom I once knew. She did so long to see me, she says; and I thought — I felt sure — Mrs. Armadale, let me introduce my husband."

He recovered courage, seeing that as yet he was secure. He advanced a step, and met Rachel's eyes — clear in their recognition — relentless in their hate.

"I am fortunate at last to be introduced, and *thus* introduced, to Mr. Ulverston," said she, laying a light accent on the name. Scarcely looking at her he moved away, and at the further end of the room met Ninian Græme.

"You here, too? Mrs. Ulverston holds a levee this morning."

But at the first glance interchanged between himself

and Mr. Græme, he knew he was in the power of *two*. Conscience-stricken, he once more drew back. Wherever he moved, he seemed to feel upon him the pitiless eye of the woman he had wronged, and to expect every moment that her lips would open to betray him.

But they did not open. It was not thus that Rachel apparently designed to work out her slow revenge.

"Excuse him, pray," whispered Hope to Mrs. Armadale. "I know, after his first surprise, he will be quite glad to see you, and willing for us to become friends."

"Say that aloud," answered Rachel, in a perfectly audible tone. "There ought to be no secrets between wives and husbands. Let Mr. Ulverston hear."

He started and turned round.

"I was saying," Hope observed, timidly, "that I know you will be glad to see Mrs. Armadale."

Mr. Ulverston looked despairingly round him — then stammered out "Certainly! if —"

"Thanks!" said Rachel, still addressing the wife, and never the husband. "A novel position I stand in; but there are reasons. If Mr. Ulverston would allow me to explain —"

"No need — no need," muttered he. "I shall always be happy, in any way she can point out, to serve — this lady."

"Thanks again; but that is not what I desire." She turned and met the gaze of the two men — Mr. Ulverston and Ninian Græme. The first was alarmed, abject, imploring; the second controlled her with a dumb warning, which expressed all his terror for what was coming upon Hope. Instinctively, he had drawn closer to where the latter stood at the window with little Walter, who

was crowing and leaping towards the sunshine, so as to engross her whole attention.

"What is your desire?" said Ulverston, in an under tone.

"To have sometimes the honour of visiting here — of cultivating the friendship Mrs. Ulverston is so kind as to feel for me. I trust — indeed, I am sure — her husband will not prevent it, for the sake of old times."

"Ah, no! he will not," said Hope, turning round. "It is such pleasure to me to have my Scottish friends about me. You must try all your influence, Mrs. Armadale, and we will conquer both his prejudices — against Scotland, and against the stage. Come, shake hands, will you not?" added she, making a marvellous effort at gaiety. "Mr. Græme, tell them to shake hands."

Ulverston rose with an *empressement* somewhat exaggerated. There was a reassured swagger in his manner and a daring curiosity in his look, as now for the first time he ventured to eye steadily the country girl whom he had made love to by hedge-row sides — the faithful creature who had stolen over the snow to watch by his sick bed — the devoted woman who had believed herself his wife. Perhaps seeing what she was now — there came back to him memories which, in another man had been alike sad and holy; but in him, full of all unholiness, could only spring from, and tend to wrong. After a rather eager gaze he extended his hand.

Ninian waited to see what Rachel would do. She did nothing. Her hand lay passive by her side; for, after she spoke last, she had sunk back into her chair, and sat as if all power had left her limbs; though still her indomitable will governed her features, and kept

them from bearing any outward witness to what she felt within.

"Will you take my hand?" His voice was soft — how softly he could speak sometimes! Rachel's whole frame seemed to quiver at the sound. She looked up quickly. — There he stood, in his own likeness, the young "Norman baron," smiling, handsome, gay, as if there had never been a shadow on his countenance, or a care in his heart — the very impersonation of that light nature which had come like summer sunshine to her own graver and darker spirit.

Unresisted, Ulverston took her hand. She felt the olden touch — unfelt for years — the touch of the beloved, which, to all who love, seems distinct from that of any other human hand. A shudder ran over her; she looked wildly round as if everything were a dream — all her vengeance, all her hate — and she were again an innocent girl, sitting on the green mound of the Border Castle, smiling up into her young lover's eyes.

Hope came behind. "We are all friends now. You will often come and see us. It will be so pleasant both to me and to my husband."

"Yes, but she must go now at once," interposed Ninian; for he saw a fury that was almost insanity gathering slowly in the miserable woman's face. Another eye saw it too. Terrified for the result, Ulverston made some excuse and crept out of the room. There was only Hope left — whose attention had been all along much distracted from what was passing around her by the gambols of the child. Her looks were at last drawn towards Rachel.

"Mrs. Armadale seems ill, probably from exhaustion. Shall I send for wine? No. I will fetch it myself."

"Do so," said Ninian, thankful for any excuse to get her out of Rachel's sight. When she was gone, he took the latter by the hand.

"Come, quick! before she returns." Rachel looked at him bewildered. "There is no help for you. You are not able to control yourself. You *must* obey me. Come!"

He drew her hand under his arm, and half-leading, half-guiding her, — for there seemed no resistance in her spirit, no strength in her frame, — he got her safely out of the house. Scarcely had they left it, than he saw Hope crossing the few yards that led to the garden-gate. He went to her.

"You must excuse all," he said, hurriedly. "Mrs. Armadale is a strange, impulsive creature, and her mind is weak through suffering. She had best go home at once. I will explain everything to-morrow."

Hope assented; so he rejoined Rachel, and never left her until he saw her safe in the care of one, who was as usual waiting outside, ready to guard and watch over her mistress, — the faithful Jane Sedley.

CHAPTER XIV.

It was on a Saturday morning that Rachel had gone to Brompton. By mere chance, she was not to act that night. So far, Ninian was at rest. He spent all day in vain reasonings, plannings, conjectures. Sunday came — the quiet Sabbath-day which had used to be such a happy one at The Gowans; but he found no rest. He had risen late, outworn with anxiety, when he heard that a little old woman wished to see him.

It was Rachel's servant.

"What news? Is she more calm? You know all, of course?"

"Yes, Mr. Græme, I do know all," said Jane, curtseying herself into the back parlour, with the evident determination of a *tête-à-tête*. "My mistress has been very ill, but she is asleep now, poor dear! and so I came away that I might speak to you without her knowing."

Here Mrs. Reay's voice was heard without, laden with a rather imperative warning to her brother, that it was church time.

"Have you much to tell me, Mrs. Sedley?"

"A great deal, sir; but if you have not patience enough, or regard enough for my dear mistress to hear me, I dare say I shall find some good Christian gentleman who will," said the old servant, testily.

"Is it so important?"

"May be, or may not be — wait and see."

He went out and told his sister that she must go to

church alone. She grumbled a good deal, for their old Edinburgh minister was that day come to preach among the small Presbyterian gathering which nestled itself in the London wilderness. "It would seem like old times, brother, when you used to walk to church between Hope and me. Ah! if I had only thought of fetching Hope."

Ninian drew back hastily into the room. There he sat down, listening mechanically to the clang of the church-bells, and waiting, almost fearing, the communication that Jane Sedley had to make.

She went about it slowly and with much reduplication, as old people do. She told a long story about her mistress's having made an engagement in Ireland, at one of the provincial theatres, how everybody raved about her, and she might have mixed in the first society, but she held aloof — as she always did.

"I know," said Ninian. "She told me she had lately been in Ireland. But what concerning that?"

"More than you think, or she either; for I would not tell her. That same time, in Ireland, I heard something; for you must know, sir, I always kept my eyes and ears open to anything that might concern my dear mistress, or that villain, who I wish may —"

"What did you hear?" said Ninian, stopping her short. Startled by his manner, for once the worthy woman expressed herself concisely.

"I heard that there was in Limerick a family called Sabine."

"Sabine! was not that Mr. Ulverston's name? — the false name he used to deceive her?"

"Ay, he did deceive her, poor lamb! God punish him for it. But, sir, though the marriage was good for nought, I'm not sure that the name was false."

"How so?"

"I'm just going to tell you. These Sabines, — they were decent enough people, but not quite gentlefolk. I know what real gentlefolk are, Mr. Græme; — I lived in good families myself once."

"You got acquainted with those people? Well, go on!"

"I am going on, sir, if you'll let me. — Old Mrs. Sabine made much of me, because I was an Englishwoman, and she said she had grand relations in England. Her husband's half-brother on the mother's side — you see, sir, I took pains to remember all — was an English baronet, who, having quarrelled with his only son, sent for Mrs. Sabine's eldest boy, brought him up, and made a gentleman of him. A pretty gentleman he has turned out! Do you understand, Mr. Græme?"

"You mean," said Ninian, "that you suspect this son to be no other than Mr. Ulverston, whom your mistress saw lately, and believes to be the man who so cruelly deceived her?"

"He is! *I* saw him too, coming in at his own door. I'd take my oath that it is him, the villain — Mr. Geoffrey Sabine."

"I believe it too. But what of that? The name is nothing; he might have assumed it by chance. There can be no doubt his right name is Ulverston."

"You're hard to convince, sir, with your Scotch caution," said Jane, rather bitterly. "Will you hear more? This young Geoffrey Sabine hadn't been near his relations since he was a youth. And a man that's ashamed of his own family, especially of his mother, has no good in him."

Suddenly there recurred to Mr. Græme the conversa-

tion at Ardmore, when Mr. Ulverston had betrayed, seemingly with reluctance, that he was born in Ireland. Also, he remembered the words, then unheeded, which Lady Ulverston had dropped about the young man's having been his uncle's adopted heir, until his cousin Peter stepped in between.

"Young Sabine's uncle was by the half-blood only," said Ninian, musing. "He might have had a different name, which he made his nephew assume. Mrs. Sedley, did you ask what was the name of this English uncle?"

"Not I! It was nothing to me. I had heard enough to make me sure that Sabine was his true name, and he had afterwards denied it, thinking a poor broken-hearted girl and a foolish old woman would never find him out. But we have, though; and should have done so before, only my mistress came away from Ireland suddenly, and I couldn't tell her why I wanted to stay."

"You told her nothing about the Sabines, then?"

"No, no! She has never mentioned his name — nor have I — ever since the night we left you in Edinburgh. I durst not let her know anything, lest it should send her off her wits again. But now that this Sabine or Ulverston, or whatever he is, has turned up, I thought I ought to tell you, Mr. Græme, all that I heard."

"You were quite right," said Ninian, absently.

"But, sir, you must help me to get her out of his way. She must never see him again — villain as he is. What good could come of it? She can't make him right her. You yourself said he had cheated her, and that she was not married — not even in your queer Scotch fashion — which, to my thinking, and that of all decent folk, is little better than no marrying at all."

Perhaps, despite his engrossing anxiety, Mr. Græme,

as a Scotsman and a W.S., felt the dignity of his country's law impugned by this speech. "My good woman," said he, "you talk about what you do not understand; our marriage law is clear enough, and binding enough too. Whether the name of Geoffrey Sabine were true or not, would have made no difference, if he had only married her in any legal way that could be proved. For instance, that written acknowledgment of which she may have told you —"

"I know, sir, my mistress kept nothing back from me," interrupted the old woman, proudly.

"If he had not — cunning as he was — obtained it and destroyed it; or if even now there were any legal evidence — a letter or writing of any kind, calling her his wife, she might prove herself as such."

The old woman turned sharply round. "What's that you say, sir? Say it again. I'm not over quick at law."

Ninian explained himself more clearly.

"You mean to say, then," continued Jane, her loquacity changing into wonderful acuteness, "that if this Mr. Ulverston is really Mr. Geoffrey Sabine, or whether he is or not, if I can swear he is the man that was my mistress's husband, and if there was only a bit or scrap of his writing saying so, it would be a true marriage, and she would be his only lawful wife, and the lady that he now has would be — no better than she should be?"

At this thought, and at her unusual manner, a terror too great for utterance shot through Ninian's heart. If the mystery of this pretended marriage could be solved — if, by any evidence, Rachel were proved to be the first and legal wife — what then was Hope? The bare thought was almost too horrible to be borne.

"Be silent!" he gasped. "Say no word against Mrs. Ulverston. Do not harm her, for God's sake."

Mrs. Sedley took no notice. She was fumbling in her great pockets, her hands trembling with avidity. Her anxiety was so great, that she evidently could not find what she wanted. She went to the window, and turned out all the contents of her pockets one by one.

Meanwhile Ninian was nigh distracted with the thoughts that crowded upon him. Could it be that Ulverston, knowing the truth of what he outwardly denied, that his first marriage was valid, had as much from revenge, as from insatiable passion, gone through the form of marriage with Hope, aware that he could at any time get free from a tie which the first bond made illegal? Could this be the reason he apparently stooped from his pride to wed the bankrupt's daughter? Or perhaps, seeing at last that it was not so easy to cast Hope off on such a plea without running a few unpleasant chances of the law, did Rachel's appearance awaken the dread that she was come not merely as a deserted mistress to upbraid her lover, but as an outraged and revengeful wife, determined to claim her husband and bring him to an open shame?

Yet how could this be? Ninian said over and over again to himself, — "There is no proof — no proof." Not a letter, not a line, not even a second witness to the fact of marriage. Oh, hard conjuncture! when he, an honourable man, felt himself taking comfort from this; unconsciously rejoicing that one woman had no evidence to remove the blot from her fame, lest in so doing the same doom might fall upon another.

If it were so, Ninian felt that he had almost rather have seen his lost darling die broken-hearted from her

husband's unkindness, than withering under such a future of shame.

All these thoughts followed each other wild and fast. It was but a minute or two since the old woman's last speech, and yet when she spoke again he started as if from a long trance.

"There, sir," Jane Sedley cried, triumphantly, but with some agitation, "you said a line would be enough. Look! Would that prove my poor mistress to be an honest woman after all?"

She placed before him a small Bible, open at the fly-leaf. Thereon was written, in Mr. Ulverston's hand, the following inscription:

"*Given to my dear wife, Rachel Armstrong, by her faithful husband, Geoffrey Sabine.*"

The date was February 7, 18—. Underneath was written, in a faint, trembling woman's hand, the text, chosen habitually by Scottish lovers in their troth-plight, "*Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform to the Lord thine oaths.*" Below it came the signature, signed by her for the first time and the last, "*Rachel Sabine.*"

Ninian read this writing — once, twice, thrice — to see that there was in it no flaw. Then he stood dumb, aghast. The truth had at length appeared, but in a form so awful in its results, that he hardly dared to believe.

"Will it do, Mr. Græme? Is it proof enough?" cried Jane Sedley, watching him eagerly. "May I go and tell my dear mistress that she is lawfully married?"

"I cannot tell — I must consider," muttered Ninian, trying to keep his thoughts clear, and weigh the case as

there were not life and death hanging on the balance. "Stop, Mrs. Sedley, give me a minute's time to think."

He sat down, his hand upon his brow. Even in that terrible moment there was some lingering of calm judgment. This he tried to use.

For several minutes there was in the little parlour perfect silence, broken only by the old woman's short cough, and the merry singing of Mrs. Reay's canary. Amid that pause, Ninian had time to think what he should say, knowing that on his next words might rest the doom of her to save whose happiness he would have given his life.

At length he spoke, in a very low tone but without sign of emotion, — just like a lawyer questioning an important witness,

"When did this book come into your possession?"

"It was under a heap of old newspapers in Mr. Sabine's room. I found it when I cleaned out my cottage, just before I gave it up."

"After you and Rachel saw me in Edinburgh?"

"Yes, sir."

"How did it come there?"

"Mr. Sabine must have lost it; he was very careless of all his things. He went away in a great hurry at last. I remember his calling me in, and asking me if I had seen some of his books — especially a Bible or Testament that was missing. I noticed, because he was not very particular about his Bible, and I wondered that he should make a fuss over it now. At last he went away, telling me to look over his books, and keep all his things safe till he sent for them."

"Did he send?"

"Ay, and had them all; but as I said, I didn't find

this till long afterwards. Anyhow, I should not have sent it, because you see it was *her* book — not his."

"Did you give it to her, or tell her when you found it?"

"I wasn't quite so foolish as that, Mr. Græme. Bless you! it would have driven her mad at once. No, no, poor darling! I kept it out of her sight, and have carried it about in my pocket always. Many a time I thought of burning it; but somehow I couldn't burn God's Holy Word, even though that wicked man had written in it."

"Was this, do you think, the acknowledgment of marriage Rachel spoke of?"

"No; not it. He wrote another paper — the one he kept. Who'd ever think that this was a marriage? just a name written in a leaf of a Bible! We English people would never believe such a thing. But little care I, if it only holds good in law, and brings my dear mistress to her rights? -Are you sure of this, Mr. Græme?"

He was silent. He knew that from one assent of his, Jane Sedley in her passionate fidelity, and Rachel maddened with her wrong, would both at once proceed to desperate measures. Perhaps that very night, without pause or preparation, the blow might fall; — the blow which, whether she loved Ulverston or not, would crush Hope for ever.

"Won't you answer, sir?" persisted the old woman, angrily. "Here have you been questioning me, and got all out of me. How do I know that you'll not use it against my mistress? You are a friend of Mr. Ulverston's."

"I his friend?" muttered Ninian, hardly able to

suppress the fierce passion that shook his manhood — the burning desire for vengeance on the destroyer of his own peace and that of the girl he had loved. "If I had him here, and God's law did not forbid murder —"

"Eh — what, sir?" cried Jane Sedley, half-frightened at his looks. At once, Ninian came to his right senses again.

"I am no friend to Mr. Ulverston," said he, calmly. "But in cases like these, we must not hastily judge. We must take time! Though Ulverston may be the man who married Rachel, there is no clear proof that the name under which he married her was really his own. It might be that of some friend which he used."

Mrs. Sedley looked alarmed.

"Would that make the marriage void, sir?"

"No; but it would increase the difficulty of proving it. There would be an action in the Court of Session — costing much time, much expense, lasting perhaps for years. I repeat again," said he, in the eagerness of his fear, "you must do nothing hastily — as yet, you must not even tell your mistress."

"Not tell her! — not let her know that she is an honestly married wife — even though her husband is a villain! What do you mean, Mr. Græme? I'll not listen to you — I'll go and tell her at once — my poor, poor girl — my mistress, I mean — though sometimes I talk as if she were my own Jessie that's dead and gone. She shall hold up her head yet, my darling! as good and lawful a wife as any in the land."

And the faithful creature, who from her own anxiety and her respect to Mr. Græme had hitherto controlled herself, now began to weep like a child.

But Ninian seemed to have no sympathy — no

feeling left. Both were dried up in one overpowering horror of what was coming upon Hope.

"I entreat you — I desire you, not to tell her yet," persisted he. "Consider her weakness, — her present state of excitement; she could not bear such a shock — not even of joy. Wait only a week — a day!" While saying this, the hypocrisy of his words smote him with humiliation. But that was nothing. At all risks, he must gain time.

Jane Sedley seemed rather struck with his reasons.

"You may be right, Mr. Græme — you were always thoughtful over her, and you are a just and kind gentleman. I believe you would not keep her a day out of her rights if you could."

Poor Ninian! he felt almost as if there had been guiltiness in the agony with which he strove to ward off, only for a time, the impending woe.

"I can't wait any longer now," said the old woman, as the footsteps of returning church-goers began to come pattering beneath the window.

"Then you will promise me, Mrs. Sedley, that for a few days at least, until I have gained more evidence and am clearer in my mind, Rachel shall be told nothing? Mind — I say, nothing!"

"Well, I'll promise. Poor thing! she has no friend but you. And you'll sée to her — you'll take care of her interests, and bring her to her rights! I know you will, for you are a good and honest gentleman, Mr. Græme," said the old woman, as she went out, rather hastily, for Mrs. Reay and the Professor were just entering the door.

Ninian scarcely heard them. All his mind was absorbed in the future opened to him by Jane Sedley's last words.

He, then, was to be the one with whom rested judgment! It was he, who as Rachel's only friend must guide her to the restitution of her honour — it was he who in so doing must bring Hope to the knowledge of the truth, and cast her forth to bear the doom which had once been Rachel's. Nay, worse, — for there was the child!

Thinking so much of her, he had never before thought of her child. Horror upon horror seemed to rise before him. The young wife, patient, if not content — the young mother, so happy, so proud! He, and he alone, must be the one to tear her life's hopes away; telling the wife that she was no wife, and the mother that her child was base-born.

He laid his head upon the table; he wrung his hands and groaned. The anguish of that moment was keener than he had ever known — ay, even than that on the day he first heard of Hope's marriage. Then the suffering was only for himself — it is often easy to bear torture which no one shares and no one sees; — but now —

Many a man, who had loved and seen another preferred before him, might have felt some selfish exultation; perhaps have even built on this misery some vague hope of winning, righteously or unrighteously, his heart's desire; but this thought could never once visit Ninian Græme. He saw before him only one vision — Hope and her unutterable wretchedness. He almost wished that this discovery had never been made; that Rachel had lived on in her supposed shame, and Hope in her blind innocence. But at last there came to him one thought which seems to live — a vivifying light — in the depths of every good heart, shining through all

darkness of conflicting duties, emotions, and desires — the sense of right and justice.

This showed him at once that there was no medium course — that Hope was either a wife or no wife. If the former were proved, nothing could harm her; if the latter, she must be at once snatched from what became henceforward a life — not of sanctified marriage, but of undoubted infamy.

At this thought, the last of an infinite multitude that had come and gone like lightning, during the time that Tinie was running up-stairs and calling rather crossly for "Brother Ninian," — Mr. Græme rose and struggled with his conscience no more.

There remained one doubt still — was the name of Geoffrey Sabine feigned or real? On this fact much, though not all, depended — since the proof that at the time of marriage it was the husband's true name, would prevent much delay. If false — perhaps, as there was only one witness to his identity, the first marriage might be with difficulty established, or even held doubtful; too much so, being a childless union, to warrant the disinheriting of an heir. This slender and cruel chance — cruel in every way — was yet the only one left.

Unable to endure suspense, Ninian determined to go at once and find out from the man himself — as the plainest and least underhand course, or if not, from Hope, though this possibility made him recoil, — whether Mr. Ulverston had always borne his present name. With this intention Mr. Græme escaped from the house before his sister saw him.

Walking fast, and in the burning summer sun, before reaching Brompton he was thoroughly exhausted. This

was even a blessing. In moments of great mental pain, there often is a sense of lulling comfort in intense bodily fatigue. Yet when he reached the house — the pretty house with its magnolia blossoms and its over-hanging acacia-trees — he felt as if it were impossible to enter it. From the high-road he could see into the half-open windows. Beside one of them, her profile turned towards him, stood Hope with the baby. He saw her bright face, he heard her laughter, not exactly merry, but full of an inward content. A cold shudder crept over him; involuntarily he passed on.

There was close by a little lane leading off from the high-road — one of those frequent Love-lanes which on summer-Sundays become worthy the name. Ninian turned down it, thinking to be quiet and recover himself. He leaned against a tree, and had taken off his hat, trying to feel the rustle of the cool chesnut-leaves. But there came by, continually, that sight he most fled from — happiness; the love-couples strolling by — the town-children walking with their parents, and each and all turning to look at the strange gentleman who stood alone by the road-side. Ninian fancied there must be in him some outward sign of what he was enduring, and once more he struggled to recover his ordinary look and manner before he entered Hope's presence.

After a while, he went back again, and came once more within the scent of the magnolias.

"Mrs. Ulverston was alone in the house," the servant said; "Mr. Ulverston was not expected home until night." Ninian paused, but there was no hesitating now — he entered the hall.

Hope was sitting by herself, singing. A holy, peaceful, Sabbath song it was — "*O rest in the Lord*," from

Mendelssohn's "Elijah." Nevertheless, there was a wail in it — to some ears at least, who hearing the words, "*He shall give thee thy heart's desire*," — knew that He sees fit not thus to give unto all. — Ninian had thought so many a time when she used to sing this at The Gowans, and yet, somehow, while she sang it, he had often half-believed that it would come to him as a truth one day. But it never had done so; teaching him that the "*waiting patiently*" must last until death.

— He remained outside until Hope had ceased; then he went in and spoke to her. For him her welcome and its frank affection never changed.

"I knew you would come, otherwise I think I should have come to you. I want you to tell me about Mrs. Armstrong — is she better? I would have gone to see her last night, but my husband wished me not. Is she really better? — What made her ill?"

Mrs. Ulverston went on with all these questions, but received no answer. Ninian could give none. To see her — so cheerful, so smiling, so kind — and know what he knew! It was almost too horrible to endure.

He looked at her — sat down — tried to speak — but it was only a gasp.

"What is the matter? You look ill. Can I do anything for you?" And Hope came and took his hand, more in the way his "child" used to do, than with the slight reserve she had unconsciously maintained as Mrs. Ulverston.

"Water — give me water. I am so tired. That is all."

He thought that plea would get her out of the room, if for a moment only, that he might groan out his soul and grow calm again. When she returned he took the

glass, drained it, and gave it back again with a faint smile.

"You see I am not so strong as I used to be. I am getting an old man now."

"You must not think so," said Hope, affectionately. "Tinie would be very angry to hear you say that, and so would I. We can't have a grim, ancient uncle for our bairns. We must have one that will laugh and play with them."

She spoke gaily, but evidently to hide her anxiety. Wistfully she regarded the face — whose secret she never had read, and never might read.

"Indeed?" said Ninian, trying to answer her playfulness. "Well, let me begin my duties. Where is Walter?" — He thought that anything, even the sight of that poor child, would be better than Hope's eye watching him thus.

"Walter is asleep up-stairs. Pray let him stay there, the young tyrant!" cried Hope, once more smiling. "When he is awake there is no peace in the house. You shall see him before you go," she added, as a piece of consolation. "But have you dined? We always dine early on Sundays. How tired you look still! What can I give you?"

"Nothing. I could not eat. Only let me rest for an hour or two."

"That you shall, and I will sit and talk to you, as I used to do." And in her old fashion, as customary on rare occasions when the elder brother came home wearied, to have the novelty of his sisters waiting upon him — Hope placed a cushion for his head and a stool for his feet, to make him "comfortable."

She began to talk — of pleasant little trifles; she

was still, as ever, one of those gentle women who have no "conversation," yet to whose speech many a wise and clever man will listen as to the easy flowing of a rivulet, which has no set music, but is only lulling, sweet, and clear.

It was in vain — Ninian could not rest.

"The house is close — this weather is awful," he said. "Will you come into the garden?" He thought, moving about under the shadow of the mulberry-trees, where he did not see her face — nor she his — it would be possible to bring the conversation to the point it had to reach.

So for half an hour they walked slowly round and round the garden, sometimes side by side, sometimes apart, as Hope stopped to look at a flower, or to glance back and listen underneath the open window of Walter's nursery.

"He sleeps a long time," she said, at last, with another wistful look. "Will you spare me a minute to go and peep at him?"

Ninian assented. All he did, said, and saw, was mechanically, as if there were upon him a horrible incubus which he could neither struggle with nor cast off. He had been with Hope an hour and yet had not learned that for which he came. At length chance brought the question nearer.

"My boy is fast asleep still," said Hope, returning. "A good thing too, for he was tired out with screaming. He does go in such passions sometimes, — my little 'Sir Walter,' as Lady Ulverston calls him."

"Why Sir Walter?"

"Because he may be a baronet some of these days — after Sir Peter and — his papa."

"Your husband, then, will inherit a baronetage on Sir Peter's death?"

"Yes. He expected to have done so before — for every one thought his cousin Peter Ulverston had died abroad. The first Sir Peter — the present Sir Peter's father — was my husband's uncle, and had educated and adopted him. But I dare say you know all this?"

Ninian could not but say the truth — that he did.

"Of course Mr. Ulverston would tell you — though he does not like to talk much about these things, even to me. I fancy his own family were never very kind to him, nor his uncle either, though, dying, he left him all his fortune."

"Is it long since this uncle died?"

"Some time, I think. It must have been before you knew my husband; for I remember, the first time I saw him, you spoke of him as *Mr. Ulverston*. Of course you were aware that that was not his name always?"

Ninian gasped for breath. For his life — not a word could he have answered.

Hope went on in her innocent talk with her own long-trusted friend, and, as she believed, her husband's likewise.

"It was really quite a surprise to me — for I did not know it until very lately. Would it not have been strange to have first met my husband under one surname, and then married him under another? It might have so happened, since, as you know, he inherited his uncle's estate and assumed his name just before coming to Edinburgh. Look — look! what a pretty lizard you are treading on!" added the young creature, stopping short. She stooped and picked it up from under Ninian's feet,

for he was staggering blindly on like one who neither heard nor saw. Then she joined him again.

He said, forgetting everything but that the question must be asked and answered, "Tell me — for I would like to know — what was Mr. Ulverston's former name?"

"Did you never hear it? It was Sabine, I believe — Geoffrey Sabine." And then she lagged behind again — the compassionate one! — to pull off a caterpillar that was eating a beautiful rose.

Ninian strode on — quickly — wildly. He felt conscious of nothing but that he must hurry from Hope's presence, — rush out of hearing of her unconscious voice, out of sight of her innocent face.

"Where are you going, Mr. Græme? Not home, surely?"

He muttered some excuse about having mistaken the hour, and that he must leave.

"But you will stay a minute, just to see my boy?"

"Not now — another time."

"That other time may be long in coming; for as I was just about to tell you, Mr. Ulverston is going abroad, and Walter and I are to spend the summer by ourselves in the country."

"Thank God," murmured Ninian.

Hope looked very much astonished, even frightened, not for herself but him. She evidently thought he must be ill, or troubled in his mind. Her manner grew tender and compassionate beyond expression.

"My dear brother — my own brother — what ails you? Has anything happened?"

He could not tell a falsehood — he never did. "Yes, Hope" — in his agony he called her by that long-silent and carefully-avoided name — "something, not to me or

mine personally, but what grieves me much. Let me away now. Only go and pray, my child — go to God and pray!"

He quitted her abruptly, for his reason seemed to reel. When scarcely gone, he remembered with terror the last words forced from him in his anguish — but the remembrance came too late. Little it mattered now, when all must be soon known.

He hurried along the high-road that burned beneath the afternoon sun, scarcely feeling where he was, looking neither to the right nor to the left. — Otherwise he might have seen, slipping out of his way, and peering in and out at the corner of the road near Mr. Ulverston's house, — a little figure in black.

It was Jane Sedley.

CHAPTER XV.

"Oh, brother! what do you think that horrid Mr. Ulverston has gone and done?" cried Tinie, as bonneted and shawled she entered Ninian's room — two days after that Sunday.

How the two days had passed, he never knew. He had done nothing — for there was nothing to be done: he felt as if Fate must have her own will, and he only sit by and watch. He had never been near Rachel; nor indeed had he stirred out at all. Some indistinct notion he had of life's daily routine going on as usual; of having to rise in the morning, and go to bed at night; of Tinie's telling him he looked ill, and should stay a little longer with her whether he liked it or not, and of his tacitly consenting. This was all the history of the eight-and-forty hours.

"Brother Ninian, how dull you are! Listen, — what do you think Hope's husband has done? He has gone off to Paris to enjoy himself, and has sent her and the baby to stay at a stupid ugly farmhouse somewhere in Kent, a place where Lady Ulverston declares she will be buried alive. And yet Hope has actually gone!"

Ninian heaved a sigh of relief and thanksgiving.

"Gone, so suddenly too! He hurried her off, hardly giving her time to pack up her things. What a very unpleasant husband the 'Flash of Lightning' must be!"

Mrs. Reay shrugged her shoulders, and without waiting for any answer went on chattering; unfolding to her

brother all that Lady Ulverston had the same morning, by a curious chance, informed her of, Mr. Ulverston's family history, change of name, &c. Such an amount of gossiping intelligence quite overwhelmed the little woman. She talked on in a small fever of excitement, occasionally pausing to see if Ninian listened. But his replies were brief, and he scarce once lifted his head the while.

"Is that all?" said he at last, when she had run through the whole voluminous history, with her own comments thereon.

"Dear me — no! I had another queer little adventure — no end to the secrets I have found out to-day." Ninian looked up. "Why, how frightened you seem! Perhaps you knew it, and never told me? Well, it is shocking, I own, and unpleasant enough to think of, but still —"

"For God's sake, speak openly, Christina," said the brother, as a cold fear stole over him.

"Now, why should you be so agitated, unless to be sure, as I once half-fancied, you were in love with her — only just a wee bit? Confess, brother!" And the wicked young lassie began to laugh heartily.

Her laughter was a relief; Ninian thought she could not laugh if she knew what he dreaded. He forced his quivering lips to smile. "This is an idle jest, Tinie. What, or who are you talking about?"

"Don't you guess? About Rachel Armstrong. Ha, ha! your look betrays you. So my wise elder brother *was* in love with her after all."

"Never! Talk no such folly again, Tinie. Tell me what you were going to say."

Made somewhat graver by his look, Tinie continued: "Of course I'll tell you, only you are not to look so cross.

I'm married now, and won't be scolded, brother Ninian. There, be good now, and you shall hear."

He listened with painful intentness.

"I was just coming out of the house at Brompton, when a little old woman met me, and asked me if I were not Mrs. Ulverston? Of course I said 'No' (with a little quiet thanksgiving to myself for the same), — 'but that I was a friend of hers,' on which the old woman questioned me to a most comical extent; until I, being rather inclined to curiosity, questioned her in return. And what do you think came out? That she knew all about the Ulverstons, and, more than that, she even knew Mr. Ulverston's former name — Sabine, I think it was."

Ninian almost groaned: "Did you tell her?"

"Either I told her, or she me, I forget. But we had a long chat; she amused me; she was such a funny-looking old woman. Besides, she said she had seen you and Edmund too, which quite puzzled me at first, until the mystery came out — ah! brother, it was too bad not to let me know. Only think that the celebrated Mrs. Armadale should turn out to be that queer daft body, Rachel Armstrong!"

She stopped, half-vexed, half-amused. The gay, easy manner relieved Ninian. Evidently, whatever Jane Sedley had discovered, she herself had in return betrayed little; Mrs. Reay, however proud of this small mystery, knew nothing of the greater one that lay beneath.

"I can't imagine why neither you nor Edmund ever told. What a shocking thing for Mrs. Armstrong to have turned play-actress! What would the Forsyths say! And think of John Forsyth's being in town so lately! He might have found out all if he had not gone back so

suddenly. Well, they are a queer family, Armstrongs, Forsyths, and all. But," added Tinie, abruptly, "the thing I can't make out is, What could Rachel's servant want with the Ulverstons?"

"She knows nothing — thank God she knows nothing," said Ninian to himself. But brief was this comfort, when he thought how soon everything must be known. The more so, as now he had no doubt of the purpose of Jane Sedley's visit to Ulverston's house. By this time her keen fidelity must have learnt all, and discovered it to her mistress likewise.

"Did you answer the old woman's questions? Did you tell her where Mrs. Ulverston was gone?" he asked.

"No, for I had forgotten the name of the place. When I offered to deliver any message, she said, 'No, she had none to send. Only I might tell my brother —' And then she stopped, seemed to change her mind, and at last hurried away without speaking any more. Now, Ninian, what does all this mystery mean? Mrs. Radcliffe's novels are nothing to it. What is the matter? Stand and unfold yourself!"

He made a vain attempt to quit the room, but his sister opposed him, — half playfully, half in earnest. He saw there was no putting off Tinie's curiosity. Her suspicions were aroused, and she was determined to be satisfied. A jest availed not, and his truthful nature recoiled from a lie. He resolved to trust — not her secrecy, but her sense of honour.

"Christina," said he, gravely, trying to control voice and speech so as not to betray himself more than necessary. "You see something is wrong, and that a great anxiety troubles me. It is not my secret or yours but

belongs to others. I cannot tell you more now, but time will explain all."

Tinie looked frightened — too frightened even for curiosity.

"Meanwhile," Ninian continued, "you must show kindness to your brother by helping him to keep a secret which you yourself do not know. You must ask me no questions — take no notice of me — tell no one what I say. Promise!"

"I will," said she, subdued into obedience. "Only one thing. Does my husband know? Is it any trouble coming upon us — upon my Kenneth?"

"No!" said Ninian, sadly. "Be at rest, my little sister, it will not harm you or Kenneth."

"Nor you either, brother? You said it was nothing that concerned yourself?"

He made some vague answer, enough to content the wife, whose chief anxiety was already satisfied. For a moment, amidst all his cares, the brother painfully noticed this, and then felt that all was as it ought to be. Alas! he had long been accustomed to the lot, which every solitary one must learn to bear — that of knowing himself to be the first object, first care, to no living soul!"

Tinie, on recovering herself, hardly knew whether to be annoyed at being kept in a dim twilight of mystery, or proud of being considered in some measure a trustworthy little woman, as indeed, in extreme cases, Ninian always held her to be. But he left her no chance of finding out more, for immediately afterwards he left the house.

He went at once to Mrs. Armadale's — [illegible] purpose he scarcely paused to reflect; still,

pelled to go. So hasty were his movements, that Jane Sedley had not returned, and his first sight of Rachel convinced him that the old woman had kept her promise. As yet the deserted wife was evidently not aware of the secret which proved her marriage.

It was with difficulty that he had gained admittance; nor, on seeing her, did he marvel at that. She was lying on a sofa, exhausted and ghastly pale; but on his entrance she tried to rise, and assume her usual manner.

"I have been waiting for you, Mr. Græme, these several days. My servant, or rather I should say my friend — the only one I have — said she thought you would be sure to come."

"I would, could I have been of any service to you," was the somewhat hesitating answer. "But I did not expect to find you so ill," continued he, noticing that, after the exertion of speaking, she had leaned back, thoroughly overpowered. "I saw by the play-bills that you were acting last night and the night before."

"So I did."

"Good Heavens! How was it possible?"

"I make everything possible that I have the will to do. Besides, I could stand and walk, had no physical ailment, — therefore I must appear. We actors have no choice."

She spoke in a dull, mechanical tone, as though to any ordinary visitor. It was apparently the tone that, from some motive or other, she had determined to keep with Ninian Græme. Before he could break the ice, or move her from that strange reserve, which seemingly in defiance, she observed towards him — their conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Jane Sedley.

The old woman came in, heated and worn; and, unobservant of all beside, stole to her mistress.

"Are you better, my dear — my love? Does your head ache less, do you think?" said she, in a manner half-caressing, half-respectful, but much agitated.

Rachel touched her on the shoulder, speaking more gently and tenderly than it had seemed possible for Mrs. Armadale to speak.

"Never mind me, Jane; you are tired, rest a little. You see, Mr. Græme is here."

At sight of Ninian the old woman seemed hardly able to control herself. She crossed the room to him. "You're come at last, sir! It's well you have — I wouldn't have held my tongue another day. I have found out all, and I'll tell her all! Prevent me if you dare!"

Though she still had the caution to speak in an under tone, her words caught the ear of Rachel, who turned languidly round. "What is that you are saying about preventing? Have you not been to the theatre, as you intended?"

"No, no!" cried Jane Sedley, running to her. "I've cheated you every day, because I durst not tell you where I was going. But you'll forgive me? You would if you knew!"

Rachel lifted her head, wakened into life and energy by the one thought which alone was likely to present itself. "You have been — ay, tell me the truth — you have been to *him?*"

"I have, I have," muttered the poor woman, confounded by the sternness of her manner.

"I told you not. I told you none should deal with him but myself. Why did you go?"

"Because —" and, startled by her mistress's sudden anger, the old woman hesitated. Ninian came to her side. He too had noted the change in Rachel's face, and how fearfully the spirit seemed writhing within her shattered frame.

"Take care," whispered he to Jane, forgetting all but present pity. "I know what you know; but tell her gently. People have died from joy sometimes."

Died from joy! Even while he uttered them, what a mockery seemed the words!

"Why did you go? Did you see him? Did you speak to him?" cried Rachel.

"*I* see him? *I* speak to him? No, no! Better not! I should have told him something that would have made him quake where he stood. Oh, he's a villain — a villain — though he is your husband!"

Rachel started and sat upright. "What do you mean? Are you insulting me — even you?"

"It's all true, quite true! Ask Mr. Græme. He knows it."

Instinctively she turned to Ninian, but with a vacant, stunned look. He was silent; he could not thus for the first time give utterance to the truth — a truth which, by the confirmation of his own lips, would pronounce Hope's ruin.

"Why don't you speak, Mr. Græme? Why don't you tell my dear mistress all we know? She can bear it — ay, that she can."

"Tell her yourself," said Ninian, for he saw something of the old insane glare rising to Rachel's eyes.

"It has all come out, my dear child — my lady, I mean, for you will be proved a wedded lady yet. Hush — keep quiet, love; it is all as I say. He told a wicked

lie — not at first, but afterwards. His name was Geoffrey Sabine after all."

Rachel sprang to her feet, and tottered forward towards Ninian. He must speak now. The right — the truth — compassion — even fear — constrained him.

"It is even as she says, Rachel; things have happened strangely; but I would not tell you until I was quite certain."

"Is that all? — speak quicker, Mr. Græme; don't you see she is choking — dying?" screamed Jane Sedley.

"It is quite true," Ninian continued. "He tried to deceive you, but in vain. He has changed his name since then; but if, as I believe, you can prove your marriage according to our Scottish law — you are now Rachel Ulverston, his wedded wife."

She uttered a shriek of hysteric laughter — wild, fierce, and long — then fell back speechless in her old servant's arms.

But the silence was brief, for she had not fainted, nor were her senses benumbed. Very soon she rose, and the laughter broke forth again — low, but almost maniacal in its triumph, for it was the triumph of neither pride, nor virtue, nor love — but of revenge. Not a word said she; not a sign of womanly agitation did she give — nothing was heard but that awful laughter.

"She'll go out of her mind," sobbed Jane Sedley, in extreme terror. "Speak to her, Mr. Græme — only speak!"

He advanced, trying to regain the self-control whereby he might control another.

"Do you hear me, Rachel? Cease! This time is not for laughter — have you thought of the misery that is coming? Cease — and look at me, I say!"

She did so, and something in his face seemed to awe her, for her laughter was stilled.

"Do you know that even if you prove yourself to be his wife, your husband will not own you? He cannot — for his pride; he dare not — for his cowardice. He had already ceased to love you, but now he will begin to hate. Probably, you will never meet him more."

"I am glad!" she muttered; and her frenzied exultation did not sink, but rose.

Ninian went on: "To prove your marriage, you will have to pursue him — bring him to open shame — show him to have been a liar — a false swearer. He will be held as a dishonoured man, liable to the punishment of the law."

"I thank Heaven!" she cried; and the lips were parted wide as if for smiles, and the words came hissing through her white glittering teeth. "I thank Heaven for giving me my revenge!"

Saying this, she sank down half paralysed; and nothing that Mr. Græme or her old faithful servant could say had power to rouse her. There she sat, her eyes dry and bright, her mouth bent into its perpetual ghastly smile.

He turned aside in horror. There was something fiend-like in this triumph. All the woman seemed to have died out of her soul; she looked like one possessed.

Ninian thought, nay almost hoped, that it was some passing madness. For her own sake, lest this delirium of joy might overpower her reason, he tried once more to move her — not to compassion, for that availed not — but to some ray of feeling, which might produce a reaction in her mind.

"Rachel," said he, "there is one thing of which you have never thought. You remember Hope, and the child — the boy she was so proud of? If you are Geoffrey Ulverston's only lawful wife, what are they?"

Rachel looked startled, and seemed trying to collect her ideas. "I am not quite clear; say that again."

"You were wronged once; think now of her wrong. Think of the shame — hopeless, irretrievable — which must last her life, and descend upon her boy. Your misery was nothing to hers. And she so innocent — such a child still! Oh, my God! where is Thy justice?" He bowed his head, and groaned aloud.

A change came over Rachel. "I begin to understand. You mean Hope Ansted — the pretty, gentle creature I saw; she that was his wife. But that cannot be. He is *my* husband, you say — only mine. I have won my revenge upon him; and as for her —" Rachel paused. "I see it now," she said. "God, pity her! Poor thing — poor thing!"

Her mouth quivered, and her dry blanched cheeks became damp with tears. It was the first touch of tenderness which for years the woman's soul had known.

"It is too late," continued she, speaking in a voice softer and more natural, though still firm. "The wrong lies with him — not me. I must restore my honour. Even you have nothing to urge or to plead against that."

"No," answered Ninian, sorrowfully. "There is no help. Heaven's will be done. But oh!" he added, in the agony of his spirit, "it is hard to bear. My child — my little Hope — would to God she had died in that fever, rather than have lived to see this day!"

These words, spoken more to himself than aloud, were unheeded by Rachel. Afterwards, there came a

silence upon both — the lull of the tempest when its first outburst was overpast. Now they began to look around, and see with calmer eyes the ruin which had been wrought, and that which was still to come.

"You have not told me," said Rachel, "how it is that this has happened?"

Jane Sedley showed her the Bible — the chief evidence of her marriage. She looked at the page, and her whole face was convulsed. The writing — the date, never beheld since — God knows what must have been her thoughts! but they were all dumb.

At first she seemed to gaze, seeing nothing — then read, line by line, the writing there. At length she closed the book, as one would close the book of an eternal past that can never be renewed. Turning to Mr. Græme, she said very steadily and coldly,

"This, then, which I thought a love-token, lost or destroyed — will be sufficient to prove my marriage?"

"I have no doubt of that."

"Sufficient to make him, with or against his will, acknowledge me as his wife before the world?"

"It is indeed so."

"While I live, all his other ties are unlawful? He is fast bound to me as my husband, and can call no other woman wife but me?"

"That is most true."

Rachel stopped. Her spirit seemed to dilate within her, glorying in such entire vengeance. It lent strength to her feeble body — clearness to her disordered mind. She rose and walked up to Ninian, speaking as firmly as if the topic were some ordinary legal consultation.

"Then, Mr. Græme, since you have discovered these

proofs, you can tell me how to proceed. What shall I do to establish my marriage?"

He stood aghast at the necessity before him. "How do you mean?" stammered he. "With what view do you ask me this? Would you be reconciled to your husband? Would you have him put away those two, mother and child, and take you back to him again?"

Rachel smiled. "Look you, Mr. Græme — if I were starving in the streets, with not a door open to me but his, — and he stood beseeching me to forgive him and enter, — I would turn away to die where I lay, *outside* his threshold."

"What then is your purpose?"

"To redeem my own good name — to blast his — to tear away from him everything he has — wife, child, home, and friends — to see him as he has made me, wholly desolate, — and then to spurn him!"

Saying, this, she stood, the reality of all which her acting at times simulated — a picture showing to what awful heights of evil an injured woman can rise. A warning too that all passions, even the purest and deepest, often tremble on the very verge of their opposite crime. God knows, we have all need of His mercy preventing us and of His love sanctifying and subduing all other loves, otherwise there are few of us who, looking on some wrecked brother or sister, could not say, "So tempted, I might have been as thou."

"You are long silent, Mr. Græme. Must I repeat my former question? What is the course, the legal course, for me to take? Understand, I will only deal with him by the law; I want nothing from him but justice and a name — Sabine or Ulverston I care not,

so that it is the name of his lawful wife. How am I to obtain this?"

"There must be an action raised in the Court of Session. You must gather together witnesses, proofs," said Ninian, mechanically. "All must be made public; our Edinburgh law courts will ring with it. Possibly there may follow a criminal trial for intermarriage with the second wife. Oh, how will she bear such horrors!"

His voice, steady at first, sank into a groan; but Rachel heeded him not.

"It is all clear now. I am glad to have a friend like you. Money, too," she added, speaking quickly, her mind seeming endowed with a new and strange acuteness in worldly things; "you will want money! Well, I shall have abundance for you. I can act every night; they will double my salary then. Jane has saved something for me likewise — how much is it, Jane? There, give it to him. Take it, Mr. Græme; pay yourself and all others. You will conduct my case?"

He put aside the money, sickening at the sight. "I cannot — it is impossible."

She looked amazed — displeased. "Why not?"

"I give no reasons; simply, I cannot do it. My refusal harms you not; there need be no secrecy now. Many friends will aid you; any Edinburgh advocate would take up your cause. It is a just one, God knows; but you must not ask this of me."

He attempted to go away, when Jane Sedley angrily stopped him. "You are a worse friend and a less honest man than I took you for, Mr. Græme; you ought to be glad to punish that villain, and right my mistress! Or,

if you will not do this yourself, find for her somebody that can."

"How do you mean?"

"Send somebody to her — some kind-hearted, honest lawyer, if there is such a thing — who will help her to get justice. You say she has the right with her, and yet you will not stir a step for her sake. Where is your conscience gone to?"

Ninian started. The upright man was touched to the core. "Hush!" he said; "give me paper and a pen."

He wrote — his fair hand-writing seeming half illegible — the address of one of his Edinburgh brethren. This he gave to Mrs. Sedley; or rather she took it, clutching it as eagerly as if on it rested the fate of her beloved mistress. Truly there must have been something noble in the woman to have awakened in this old withered heart an attachment almost as passionate as that of youth.

"Now, Rachel, I must leave you; I can do no more," said Ninian, feeling himself all but spent. "Go to Edinburgh; prove all you can." And he remembered — he hardly knew whether with relief or pain — that she could prove nothing for some time; since it would be November before the law courts were sitting. "Whatever the event, God judge the right and support the innocent. Farewell."

"Is it farewell?"

"For the present. I shall probably quit London. Anyhow, it will be best for us not to meet just yet."

She held out her hand, uttering some thanks; but she was too much absorbed to notice anything much.

Her nature had been always restricted within its own emotions; engrossed first by its passionate love, then by its intensity of vengeance. From these two things — two, yet one in their root — all her sympathies culminated, and then drew back within their boundary. Beyond was nothing, either to feel, or hope, or become.

Poor wretch! It must have been a crushed and lifeless heart that could thus let tried friendship go, like a broken reed.

But she did let it go, almost without questioning, or consciousness of what was being done. Ninian, when he quitted Rachel's door, felt a presentiment that the bond between them, so strangely formed, which had cost him so much, was thus tacitly dissolved. It was best for all.

CHAPTER XVI.

It was yet summer, though the leaves were beginning to turn. The red hedge-roses were mingled with that sickly-scented white one — the first signal that the time for wild flowers is passing and the year has began to wane. The wheat-fields were of a pale yellow, the hop-gardens rich and green. For this scene — a faint fragment of landscape — was in Kent, and the traveller who filled its foreground was Ninian Græme.

He was going down to the farmhouse where for some time past Hope and Tinie had been staying together, in innocent unconsciousness of the future, renewing their girlish pleasures, enjoying the additional one, dearest to all young matrons — the baby.

Once or twice Mrs. Reay had given her brother frightened hints about the secret with which he had half-trusted her; but as he had soon gone back to Edinburgh, and weeks slipped by and nothing occurred, she seemed to grow content, nay, even to forget it altogether. Her letters, full of fun and happiness, informed Ninian of all that happened in the safe out-of-the-way hiding-place, where probably by Mr. Ulverston's planning, Hope lived retired. On all the looming horrors of the future seemed to have fallen a lull so complete, that Ninian at times hardly believed in their reality. Nothing was heard of Rachel, nor could Mr. Græme learn anything of her plans.

But still he could not rest. Though all appeared so

calm, at any moment the storm might break. And when Lindsay proposed taking Edmund to their old haunts on the Clyde, Ninian could bear suspense no longer, but determined to go south once more.

He did not visit Rachel, though, passing through London, he saw on the playbills of the — Theatre Mrs. Armadale's name — staring in its large-lettered popularity. What a mockery it was!

The Reays' household was empty — Kenneth being doing the geological along the coast; therefore it would not appear strange that Mr. Græme should follow his sister into her Kentish solitudes. He had gone down the river to Gravesend, and was now riding across the country to Eastbrook Court.

It still bore the aristocratic name of "Court," though it had now declined into a farmhouse, where upon walls thick and ancient as those of the many-centuried village church close by, were built modern chambers, making the whole erection as composite and queer-looking as well could be. There was only a wall between the flower-garden and the garden of graves; the same great yew-tree which overhung the churchyard gate covered likewise the entrance-path to the house. It was the sole house in the village; all the rest being mere sheds or cottages; so Ninian found his way without difficulty, and dismounted under the yew-tree gate.

Though it was mid-day, he felt a damp chill come over him as he passed under that shadow; an idle fancy — but he was in that restless state of mind which induces a keen susceptibility to the most trivial external impressions. Even the silence of the garden and the house, the door standing open and the little parlour empty, — struck him with a vague dread; groundless

enough, for this deserted aspect was the mere result of harvest-time. Very soon he found some farm-servant, who told him that all the establishment, together with the lady inmates, were in the wheat-field at the back of the house. Ninian went thither, passing through a huge grim dairy, which probably had once been a feasting-hall for some old baron of King John's day, — through a poultry-yard, where the chickens were fattening under crumbling ivy-wreathed walls that according to Tinie's account were supposed to have been the old chapel attached to Eastbrook Court. All these things Ninian noted with a curious mechanical exactness, perhaps wishing by external objects to drive away the one perpetual horror that was every day growing to a nearer climax — but which nevertheless he resolved to hold secret until the latest possible moment.

The poor doomed one, the unconscious happy mother — who would not have let her enjoy to the full the last hour, day, or week of her happiness? It was indeed happiness; no need of Mrs. Reay's letters to show that. Ninian's first sight of them was enough. A merry group they were, sunning themselves in that little peep of Arcadia — an English wheat-field. He saw them at a distance, all half-hidden under a hedge, Tinie, Hope, the nurse, and the little one, who was enjoying the first summer of its baby-existence. But they did not see him, so occupied were they. He came near; he could even hear the laughter of the two women as they played all sorts of antics with the infant emperor. At last Hope emerged, her warm rosy face looking rosier and happier than Ninian had seen it since she was a gay lassie on the shores of Clyde. He could hardly bear the sight, but stole behind some wheat-sheaves and hid himself

until he could appear before them with an aspect fearfully unlike to theirs.

Hope was the first to notice that a gentleman was coming towards them. She started, and her laughter abruptly ceased.

"It's only Ninian — brother Ninian," cried Tinie, bounding to him; moreover giving him half a dozen sisterly kisses in full presence of the sky, the wheat-field, a stray gleaner or two, and Master Walter's nurse.

Hope came forward, but slowly — still a good deal fluttered by the surprise.

"Why, she looks as frightened as if my harmless brother had been the Flash of Lightning himself!" remarked Mrs. Reay.

Hope said gently, "I wish, Tinie, as I have often told you, that you would not speak so of my husband."

"Well, don't be cross, lassie; I meant no harm. But you see Mr. Ulverston *is* a flash of lightning. Here were you expecting him every day for a fortnight, and now when he says he is not coming, ten to one but he makes his appearance and carries you off."

Hope looked uneasy. "Is not this a sweet place, Mr. Græme? and does not my boy look like a thorough country boy? How grieved I should be to go. But" — and a sudden discomfort troubled her face — "perhaps that is what you are come for? Do you bring any news or any message from Mr. Ulverston?"

"No," he said, turning away, but added quickly, "Nothing brings me here but my own inclination and the wish to see my sister and yourself."

"How kind! Ah, I am so glad!" answered Hope,

quite relieved. And then the two girls — they were still little more — hovered affectionately round him, brought him to the house, would have him tell all his travels' history, and be taken care of and made much of, in the way that kindhearted women love. All that afternoon Ninian sat with them in the little cottage parlour, oppressed with a heavy bewildering dream; among them, and yet apart; obliged to smile, talk, and be merry, when his very heart was sick with fear; haunted with questions that he could not answer, pursued with inquiring looks that made him quail as if his secret had been one of guilt instead of most utter wretchedness.

Hours fled without his being able clearly to apprehend anything, or to decide what he had to do, or what was his purpose in coming. At last the bees' hum died away in the little flower-garden, the low evening sun passed from the room and only lit the tower of the old church.

"It is baby's bedtime," said Hope. "For days I have always been putting him to sleep just when the sunshine reaches the old tower. It is his clock, you see, and a very poetical clock too. The sparrows in the ivy use it; they are going to their nests, and so must my wee birdie."

She laughed, and gathering the sleepy face close to her breast, quitted the room.

"Well, Hope is a mother among a thousand!" cried Mrs. Reay. "That little fellow would drive any other body wild sometimes, but she is never tired of him. I'm sure I should be if he were mine!"

— She was a little piece of affectation, was Kenneth's blithe wife! since all the time her eyes were

moist. For a minute she stopped thoughtfully, then again broke out with —

"I wonder whether we will have Hope with us in London this winter? She would come, I know, if that old ogre of a husband would only let her. But she can't learn anything of him and his plans. He has not written for weeks, and she does not even know his address."

"How does she bear his silence?"

"Wonderfully! She certainly is the most easily-contented wife I ever knew. She said once, accidentally, that the chief comfort of matrimony was in having children to love. Very fine! and simply explained too. In my humble opinion she never loved anything so well as she does little Walter. She has done as some young girls do, married merely because she was asked and didn't happen to like anybody else better. As for real love, not knowing anything about it, her affection has just stepped over the husband and on to the bairn. She knows a mother's feeling well enough; but as for a wife's — bah! what would my Kenneth say if I were as cool and quiet about him as Hope is about Mr. Ulverston?"

Tinie, uninterrupted, delivered this long harangue. Her brother sat listening. Some little comfort he drew, but not much. If the wife's heart would not be broken, there was still the woman's, and most of all the mother's. Nothing could lighten that blow.

Hope returned, wearing the sweet look that fond mothers wear when they have left their beloved little torment in the beautiful quiet slumber that exalts a babe into the likeness of an angel.

"He is asleep at last. You should have seen him, the wee lammie!" — It was curious to note how fondly Hope kept to the words and phrases which she had

learned during her happy time in Scotland — the happiest year of her life, she always said — "He shut his bonnie eyes, and let me lay him out of my arms. He did not feel it at all, but slept as softly and sound as if nothing could ever wake him."

As she spoke, the words, — used unwittingly, as we sometimes use words at which we afterwards start, perceiving the double meaning they bear, — seemed to frighten the young mother. She changed the subject hastily, proposing a twilight walk across the fields.

Again this day, which seemed to crawl by inches, and be drawing out into a thousand fragments of life, presented itself in a new aspect to Ninian Græme. He was once more walking with his sister and Hope, as he used to walk in evenings gone by.

"It will almost be like our Scottish walks," said the latter. "For, look, what a wavy landscape it is! — and afar there is something which we can almost imagine a hill. We'll climb it and try!"

They did so, mounting a deep slope, and laughing the while. Even Ninian, deluded into forgetfulness, heard himself laugh too, and started at the sound.

"You are happy now," said Hope, looking at him; "and better, too," she added softly. "I knew you were ill, or that something was troubling your mind, the last time I saw you at Brompton. I should have been very unhappy about you, but that Tinie said it was nothing. Whatever it was, it is all past now, I trust?"

He made no answer, and she ceased; but nevertheless often glanced at him with a tender anxiety. And when they were on the top of the hill — really a respectable sort of hill for a southern county — when they stood still and looked on the landscape around and

below, growing solemnly beautiful with the grey shades of evening — she came and put her arm in his, tenderly.

"Don't you like this?" she whispered. "Is not everything so quiet and peaceful? There is that great star — Jupiter, you know, for you taught me — shining out by itself in the east; and there is the west so clear, all but that heavy bank of dark clouds."

"There will be a storm to-night. I see it coming."

"Never mind, it will not come yet; don't let us fear it before the time. And when it does come, I dare say we shall be safe at home; or else it will happen to us with the rain as it always does with trouble — we shall find some place to creep into until it is over."

She said this evidently with some kind and gentle meaning, that might touch a heart which she fancied was suffering. Encouraged by his silence, she went on preaching in her simple way.

"I think if I were ever so unhappy, I should grow content and quiet on such a night as this — standing among fields and woods — feeling that there is nothing near me but God and the creatures that He takes care of — the grass that He makes grow, the stars that He keeps always shining, and the little birds that He finds food for. One feels sure that He would always take care of us too, whatever happened."

"Do *you* feel this, Hope?"

"Yes, I do. No trouble would quite weigh me down, I think, if I felt that God loved me, and other people loved me, and I had done nothing very wicked. Likewise," she added, with a natural, momentary impulse, "if I had my baby with me."

They were both silent; but with one of the two it

was the silence of inward thanksgiving. He looked at the serene face, half-lifted towards the sky, and felt that in some way or other there would be compensation — that God would not suffer the innocent to perish.

The walk home was very quiet — even Tinie's gaiety being hushed. Long they lingered in the lane, in the garden, in the churchyard, as if loath to pass from under the solemn restful heaven to any roof upon which might hang the shadow of human disquiet and woe.

At last they came to the door; for Hope had seen a light moving in the room where her boy slept. She crossed the threshold hastily, and went up-stairs. Very soon Ninian and Tinie indistinctly heard her voice, in a startled exclamation.

"There's a lady here," explained the child's nurse, who was descending the staircase. "She came an hour ago, and has waited for my mistress. I had just taken her up to the nursery, for she wanted to see Master Walter."

"It can't be Lindsay, or Ruth, or Esther. Perhaps it is Lady Ulverston," cried Tinie, much surprised.

But Ninian knew better. There was but one woman likely to be here. He felt that the crisis was come. Without saying a word he went upstairs. Stumbling and groping his way through the dark house, he reached the room where Hope was. He heard her speaking.

"It is very kind of you to seek me out here. Forgive my being so startled: but I did not at first recollect you. Have you seen Mr. Ulverston? But, I forget, he is in Paris."

"Is he?"

Ninian knew the voice — only too well! Regard-

less of everything, he pressed forward, and scarcely knocking at the door went into the nursery.

Rachel was standing over the little bed; Hope being at the opposite side. The child, still asleep, lay between the two. Both looked at it, and from it to one another; neither observed Ninian until he spoke.

"Forgive me; but I must see Rachel Armstrong."

"You here?" she said, hurriedly.

"I am here, thank God," he answered, in a low tone.

"You dare not prevent me? You cannot! It is too late."

"What is too late?" interposed Hope. "Why do you speak so strangely to Mr. Græme? I am sure he is very glad to see you, and so am I. Will you come down stairs, Mrs. Armstrong?"

"That is not my right name; I must not hear it any more."

Hope, afraid lest she had touched some painful chord, turned uneasily to Mr. Græme, who came to her side, as if vainly thinking he could protect her still.

"I am very sorry — I did not know," she murmured. There was a pause. Then Ninian said,

"Rachel, I know why you have come here. Your purpose must be accomplished, but it shall be done when and how I think best. Meanwhile, will you retire, or shall I take away this lady?"

But Rachel never stirred. Her wild eyes were fixed upon the young mother, who at some slight movement of the little one had knelt down and put her face beside it.

"He taunts me with being childless," she muttered. "He says, he would not have disowned me if I had

given him an heir. And now he wishes to bind my tongue — to lure or threaten me into silence — for the sake of these! But I will speak."

Ninian grasped her arm. "Not a word! She must be told, but I only must tell her. Go you away."

His commanding gesture, and Rachel's vehement resistance, frightened Hope.

"What is the matter? What am I to be told? Nothing has happened — nothing can happen. Oh, no."

She snatched the child, who woke, nestled close to her, and smiled. Reassured of this — evidently her chief terror — the mother turned again to Ninian.

"I don't understand. Why does she look at me? — what does she want? If there is anything dreadful to hear, tell me!"

He could not speak, and even Rachel seemed silenced at thought of the misery that by her means was the next moment to be brought upon that young trembling creature — who, clasping her child, gazed from one to the other with a face of such piteous supplication.

"Why does no one tell me? Is it any misfortune — or —" and her voice sank, more with awe than terror, "is it anything that has happened to my husband?"

"Your husband!" said Rachel, in bitter scorn. "Poor girl! he told you so, and you believed him! As if it had been the first lie his cruel lips had told!"

"Come away, Hope," cried Ninian in despair. "Come with me, and you shall know all."

Terrified as she was, Hope stood irresolute.

"First, tell me what does she mean by speaking so ill of my husband?"

"*Your* husband!" again Rachel echoed, and now the

torrent of her passion poured forth unrestrained. "It is false — he is *my* husband. He married me, years ago, and then forsook me. I loved him — as you never loved him — you weak, simple child! Now, I hate him — as no woman ever hated man before. But for all that, he is my husband."

Hope looked at her in a wonder wholly unmixed with suspicion — her innocent nature could not fathom such an abyss of wrong. She only held her baby closer, and drew towards Ninian, whispering,

"She is mad, I think — poor Rachel! Take care of us, Mr. Græme."

"Mad, am I? Ask him — he knows!" and she pointed to Ninian. "Ask Geoffrey Ulverston, who is coming here to-night! He will say who is the true wife! You, and the poor wretch in your arms, are —"

"Hush — have you no mercy?" groaned Ninian, as he tried once more to draw Hope from the room; but she turned towards him her white imploring face.

"Stay one minute — Mr. Græme! Brother! *you* would not deceive me. I am his wife? It is not true what she says? You are sure it is not true?"

He did not answer, but turned away from her. It was enough. Hope sobbed out, "The child! the child!" and fell senseless, still fast clasping the poor babe.

The long-impending horror had fallen. All was over now. This was Ninian's first thought — almost a thought of relief. Without looking or speaking to Rachel, he took Hope and her child at once in his arms, carried them from the room, and called loudly for his sister.

It is strange, in such scenes of misery, how brief an explanation reveals all. In a minute or two Tinie knew everything that could be told.

At heart Kenneth's merry wife was a good little woman — tender, sensible, and brave. She showed these qualities now. One burst of womanly wrath and horror relieved her mind, and then she became perfectly self-collected. She took the child from its mother's rigid arms.

"Carry her to my room, brother — quick! She is recovering now."

Hope did recover, as soon as she was laid down. Instinctively she missed little Walter from her clasp, and uttered a heart-rending cry.

"Give her the child," said Ninian.

He was right. The touch of the little arms dissolved the poor young mother's agony to tears. "My baby — my own boy — oh, what will become of my baby!" she moaned, over and over again; but by degrees the moans grew softer, and the tears only flowed.

"Do not speak to her, she does not notice us," Ninian whispered. "Let her alone; the child will comfort her best."

There was a broken-heartedness in his voice, as if he felt keenly that even this power — that of comforting — was not his. Very soon he stole out of the room. She would not miss him, he knew.

He bethought himself of Rachel, and went to her. She was still sitting in the child's nursery, mute and quiet, with a dull resolve fixed on her countenance.

"Are you satisfied?" said Ninian. "What do you mean to do?"

"To wait and meet him. He is coming to-night."

"Mr. Ulverston? And you will stay here?"

"Why not? Is it so strange that a wife should appear in her husband's house?"

"So you have met him — you will be reconciled to him?"

She laughed bitterly.

"He is not abroad, then? I thought not — all false as he is. Doubtless he has been with you, or has tried some compromise to prevent this public disgrace?"

"You guess right. He thinks he will tame and soothe me. He tells me he does not love this girl he married; that he never loved any one but me. He would own me, but for the worldly shame of so doing, and for the sake of the boy, his heir. So, instead, he offers me half his fortune, together with his love and his generous protection! He has planned to come hither and take away the mother and child to some poor hiding-place, and then, he says, he will fly to me. Instead of which — he will find me here."

And the deadly resolve with which she spoke showed what he would find — no loving, humbled woman — but a relentless avenger. Ninian shuddered lest her purpose should not even hold sacred her enemy's life.

"I know what you think," said she, suddenly. "Do not be afraid; I shall not murder him. Perhaps" — and her tone fell — "perhaps I might forgive him after he was dead; therefore he must not die."

Saying this, she relapsed into a sullen silence, and after a few words Ninian left her. His only thought was a thankfulness that the end had come; his only hope, that he might never see Rachel's face more.

But there was no time to be lost. He returned to where Hope was. She had grown calmer now, and sat rocking the child, who slept — the mother's milk scarce dry upon its lips — the mother's tears still dropping on its brow. Alas, on that brow they might eternally

fall, and never wash out the brand of shame! Whether it was that in her ignorance she hardly realised her position, or whether her mild and pure nature was the more fitted to bear any sorrow, but Hope seemed less overwhelmed than Ninian had expected. Her pale looks — her mute extended hand — touched him to an almost womanly weakness.

He came and leaned over her. "God pity thee, innocent one!"

"I know He will," said she, weeping. "He will forgive me too, for I meant no wrong. But, oh! my child — my child!"

That was her chief agony, and for that alone could there be no comfort or hope.

Once she seemed to snatch at the faint doubt which seizes many in cases of horrible calamity. "It cannot be real; I have been foolish, or dreaming. Brother, you yourself always called me Mrs. Ulverston; — and look — here is the ring with which he married me. He does not love me — I knew that long ago; but I am his wife, and this is his boy — his heir. Oh! tell me that what she said is not true!"

But in Ninian's countenance she read her answer. She sank back, and asked no more.

Suddenly a new thought appalled her. "If I am not his wife, what am I? Does he know anything? Where is he? Did she not say he would come to-night?"

Ninian assented.

The poor young creature seemed waking to a full consciousness of her position. "To-night," she almost shrieked. "He will be here to-night, and he is not my

husband. I must run — I must fly; anywhere — anywhere."

She rose, and clutching her baby tighter tried to stagger to the door. But Mr. Græme stopped her, and Tinie clung round her sobbing.

"Don't hold me — don't!" Hope cried, frantically. "He will be here, and I am not his wife. Perhaps he will take my baby from me: he used to threaten it sometimes. Oh! let us go and hide ourselves, I and the child."

"She is right," said Ninian to his sister. "Be patient, Hope; I will take you away to-night. You will be safe with me."

"And I'll go too. I would not for worlds stay and meet that wicked, wicked man," exclaimed Tinie, passionately.

But Hope turned from her to Ninian. One look at his face, so full of grief, tenderness, and consolation, seemed to calm her. She drew close to him, she and her poor child.

"You will take care of us — you will never forsake us, brother?"

"Never, so help me God!" It was the last promise, which marked his renunciation of every lingering of human passion, and consecrated to him this sacred wreck of perpetual sorrow, whom henceforth his hearth mus receive as a sister beloved, to be comforted and cherished evermore.

He took her away. It was almost midnight, and they had miles to go before they could reach the nearest point on their road to London. There was no conveyance to be had; so he got a waggon from the farm-people, half filled it with straw, and there placed Hope and her child.

She was very patient, doing all that he and Tinie bade. She had even thought enough to take warm and sufficient clothes for the boy, but of herself she was wholly regardless. Mrs. Reay left the nurse with orders to follow next day to her house in London.

"There, we're all right now," said the energetic little woman, as she settled Hope and the baby comfortably in the waggon, sheltering them from the heavy summer-storm, which, as threatened in their evening walk, was now coming on fast. Alas! fate had travelled faster than the clouds!

"It will be an awful midnight journey, but no matter if we get her away safe," said Ninian, as he prepared himself to walk alongside.

Scarcely had they started, winding heavily down under the black walls of the old church, when they heard the sound of a horse's hoofs in an opposite direction. It dashed up the farm-yard, and the rider's voice was audible, calling impatiently.

"He is come," whispered Tinie to her brother, though Hope lay quite still and dumb. "We are only just in time. But hasten on. He may follow."

"Let him, if he dare!" muttered Ninian, with an almost savage joy. He felt that now this man could thwart him no more; that at last his treasure — ruined and blighted, but still a treasure — was henceforward and for ever his own.

CHAPTER XVII.

It was daylight — the grim, pale daylight which dawns after a storm, — when they reached Gravesend. Ninian would have stayed a few hours, but Hope resisted; all she said was, "Oh, let us go on and get far away!" She seemed to have a vague terror that her child would be claimed by Mr. Ulverston.

"You need have no fear," answered Ninian, driven at last to explain the hard truth. "It is only over his lawful children that a father has any right. Poor Walter is safe — he is the same as if he had no father."

These words — which Mr. Græme uttered with pain and hesitation — were caught up by Hope as if they had been words of bliss.

"My boy is then mine — all mine! Nobody has any right over him — nobody can take him from me, or teach him to grow up a bad, cruel man! Oh! thank God, thank God!" Thus she cried, and snatching her darling covered him with kisses.

Tinie whispered her brother:

"There's mystery here. What a wretch of a husband he must have been, when she is so glad to get the boy out of his way that she never minds herself at all. Hope," she added aloud, "did he ever try to take away the baby, or send you away and keep Walter, or anything very dreadful?"

Hope shuddered, and did not speak. Heaven knows

what might have been the secrets of her married life — but she never told them.

"Let her alone, she must have no questionings," said Ninian to his over-curious sister. And so, still in silence — except for the low, incessant wail of the child — they travelled on to town.

It was bright morning when they drove through London streets. Very haggard and tired showed the faces of all three. When they came to Tinie's home, the good little woman — who, forgetful of her own fatigue, had been trying for an hour to quiet little Walter — heaved a sigh of relief.

"Thank Heaven! it is all done. We can be at rest here."

But Hope could not rest. She seemed to sicken with fear at the very sight of London. She refused to go to bed, or even to undress the child.

"I must travel further yet," she said, and turned entreatingly to Ninian, whom hitherto she had hardly noticed; indeed, she noticed nothing but the babe. "Oh, take me and hide me safe in Scotland! Oh, let me go home to Lindsay."

"You shall go home," said he, gently. "But we must wait a day or two, to give my sister time to come back to The Gowans. Besides, we ought to stay until the nurse returns from Eastbrook. That will occupy to-day — to-morrow — on Friday morning we will start for Edinburgh."

The quiet way in which he settled everything seemed to calm Hope. She assented without any more resistance. But still, as if incapable of thinking or acting for herself, she sat in the little back-parlour, the only portion of the house at present habitable; sat in desolate plight, her

hair falling loose, her dress travel-soiled and still damp with rain, rocking on her knee the restless child, whose beautiful babyhood seemed to have faded away under the shock of the great calamity which had befallen his mother.

"He does not look like my bonnie boy, who was so rosy and so neat," sighed she, in a piteous simplicity. "Even his little frock is all tossed and spotted, and I have not another for him."

"Never mind," said Tinie. "He will do very well; but we must first think of his mother. Look at your wet shawl and dress. You have been half-drowned with rain, in spite of all our care. What's to be done? To think of your having to run away in this fashion! Poor lassie, to be left with nothing but the clothes you wear!"

Hope looked down helplessly, and shook her head. "No," said she, mournfully. "We two have nothing in the wide world but one another. What will become of us, Walter, my child?"

Ninian stood by and listened. His heart groaned — and then dilated with a strange content.

He called Tinie aside, and bade her see that the mother and child had everything needful for their comfort, to be provided at his cost. "You know," he said, "we must think of her as wholly our sister now."

Hope and the poor infant were taken to bed, and he did not see them again. But many a time, passing up and down stairs, he stopped on the landing-place and listened — even as he had listened when his darling was ill of the fever. How strangely changed his feelings were! Into what a holy serenity had his passion died!

He could look at the mother and child, in their double image so sacred, without one thought of the girl Hope, whom he had loved, not wholly in mere tenderness, but at times with the desperate frenzy with which men can love. All that was gone now. No more wild longings for an unattainable good! He knew, of a surety, that even had he still hoped or desired it, there was now no possible chance of Hope's being his own. He looked into the future, and saw nothing but blackness. There was the law-trial, which, with all its painful suspense and exposure, might last for years. Even when its doubtful issue appeared, should Hope be pronounced no wife, still, her conscience — ay, and his own — would shrink from the idea of her forming another marriage while her child's father lived. And in any case what future could there be to one so wrecked, so desolated as she?"

All these things, as was meet, Ninian weighed well in his clear mind, acute understanding, and good heart, conscious of its own integrity — conscious too that the secret it once held was confessed to none, and guessed only by Lindsay. But she would have trust in him, as he in her; he need not fear his sister. There could be no question as to the propriety and justice of the course which instinctively he had decided upon — to take the forlorn mother and child to live at The Gowans.

Once this plan would have smote him with terror, but he was calmer, older, and wiser now. Even should a change come in the course of time, and, unchecked by the sacredness of sorrow, the ashes of his olden love revive, he could not suffer more than he had suffered in the days when she was a girl with his sisters. And still, as ever, the suffering would be all his own. Determined to face all probabilities, he faced even this: but it never

made him waver. Hope must come home to the house of her adopted brother, who for life vowed to be a tender and faithful guardian over her and her worse than fatherless child.

In the evening the nursemaid came from Eastbrook, bringing Mrs. Reay's trunks, but nothing of her own mistress's. She had not dared, she said. Her master had been all night like some wild creature, raving about the room.

"Was it because his wife had gone?" asked Tinie.

The woman answered, "She hardly thought that. He had come into the house tired and cross, and had called for Mrs. Ulverston; at which the lady in the parlour came and met him, just as if she was answering to that name, only she looked so desperately savage, and he so confounded with surprise. She pointed for him to go into the parlour, went in after him, and shut the door."

"What else? Do tell us all," cried Tinie, her curiosity getting the better of her.

"There's little to tell, ma'am. There was terrible loud talking — his voice, not the lady's. I suppose they thought nobody heard — as indeed nobody did but me, for all the house were in bed. In a little while the parlour-door opened, and the lady came out, he after her. He seemed begging something or other, but she took no notice. At last he touched her arm — I think he was going to kiss her — a bad sort of man was my master always! But she just came quietly to the kitchen-table, and took up a knife and showed it to him, with such a smile! Gracious me! whoever she is, she's an awful creature!"

The woman looked quite frightened, and so did Mrs.

Reay. But Ninian, who was standing a little apart, said, "What became of her?"

"Goodness only knows! All I know is, that Mr. Ulverston went back, looking frightened enough, and that I let her out at the house-door. She would go, though it was in the middle of the night and the rain was pelting down. But where she went to, or what became of her, nobody can tell."

Thus ended one act of the tragedy; but it was not over yet, as Ninian too well knew. All he wished was to get Hope safely housed before the tempest came. Shut up in the retirement of The Gowans, with only himself and Lindsay — for Edmund might still remain from home during the winter — it would be quite possible to keep her from the knowledge of what was passing in the world. That Ulverston would claim her there was little fear; still Ninian was anxious to get the journey over, and place the poor mother and child in Lindsay's arms.

Chance favoured him. The same evening he got a letter, saying that Lindsay had come home, leaving Edmund to wander about the Highlands alone. There was, therefore, no impediment to their starting at once.

"But you will rest, just one night," entreated Tinie. "Poor Hope has not slept at all; only lain outside the bed, watching little Walter. She is quiet enough; but she never seems to close her eyes. And by-the-by," added the sensible little matron, "I think there's something not right with the baby too. No wonder, after such a shock as the mother has had."

Ninian did not understand babies. He only wanted

to get Hope safe to The Gowans, out of the reach of more misery. So he left it with herself to decide.

"Oh, let us go," was all she cried. "Let us go to Lindsay."

It was Lindsay, still Lindsay, who seemed uppermost in her thoughts! Ninian sighed, and consented.

Afraid to torture her by more delays, they started the same night — Mr. Græme, Hope, the nurse, and child.

Any one who under circumstances of great mental trial has taken a long railway journey — had the struggling spirit and restless frame compelled within the bounds of silence and inaction — been obliged to sit quiet and look like other people, trying to put on a fictitious aspect, from the feeling that every stray passenger was peering into the depths of his mystery — any one who has known this will have some idea of how the night was spent by Ninian Græme.

He was glad it was night, and that their only fellow-passenger was a sound sleeper, who could not gaze curiously into his own face, or Hope's or that of the frightened but affectionate nurse, who had been only too satisfied to follow her mistress.

All the journey they scarcely spoke; the nurse fell asleep, and so did the child, whose heavy eyes seemed at last laden with a strange stupor. Sometimes Hope was so still that Ninian thought that even the mother's griefs were forgotten in a brief repose; but whenever he looked at her, there she always sat with her eyes wide open, fixed on the little face that was her only comfort in the world.

Ninian never spoke to her or disturbed her, but watched incessantly the profile, once so delicate in girlish

fairness, now thin, sunken, and worn. Even her beauty was leaving her; so quickly this last misery, the culmination of all other secret pangs, had done its work. His fair darling of old would soon be a shattered, worn-out woman. But he who, while loving her beauty — for no man is blind to that — yet in her beauty had loved herself, her own sweet, lovable, right-minded self — felt that whatever she was or whatever she might become, there was about her a sacred charm which no other woman could ever have in his eyes.

He watched her fondly, mournfully, as a child watches a wounded bird that has been driven home through the storm, which he knows will never sing to him more, which he may not even touch, or lift to his bosom. So Ninian sat and watched "the child" upon whom his manhood had risked its all of love — and lost it.

They reached The Gowans early in the forenoon. Miss Græme was standing beside the hall-door, pulling the dead leaves from her late autumn roses. Hearing the carriage, she turned round.

"She knows not what has happened," said Ninian in sudden alarm to Hope. "You must not mind what she may ask. Nothing must pain you. You know you are safe here."

"Yes, yes," she said mechanically, casting her poor dim eyes over the old place, seeming scarcely conscious where she was; conscious of nothing except of the child at her bosom, who had been wailing incessantly for an hour or more.

Ninian leaped out of the carriage. His astonished sister could hardly forbear a scream.

"Hush, Lindsay!" he said hastily. "No questions, only take them — Hope and the child. They are here!"

Lindsay gave vent to another little scream of joy, and darted forward.

"Stay — go into the house. I'll bring them to you there." He lifted out the mother and child, and placed them in his sister's arms.

"My dear Hope! how good of you to come! how kind!" sobbed the simple woman. "And is this your baby? And how is your husband?"

For a moment — pale, bewildered, tearless — Hope gazed into the old familiar face. — "I have no husband! — my boy has no father! — we have nobody but you! Take us, Lindsay! — take us!" she cried, in piteous tones, and throwing herself on her old friend's neck, wept violently.

"Is he dead?" said Lindsay to her brother, in a frightened whisper.

"Worse than dead. Do not speak of him yet. Please God — she shall never see him more," muttered Ninian fiercely. The sight of the old place — and her there, returned such an utter wreck — well-nigh drove him mad. He almost wished that his answer to Lindsay's question had been one brief affirmative word, or that his saying of it could have worked its fulfilment, so that Geoffrey Ulverston was left to cumber the earth no more.

But he checked his emotion — for it was sinful. "I will tell you all soon," said he to Lindsay. "Meanwhile — take her away — comfort her — let her rest."

Miss Greene had drawn her into the little study and laid her down on the sofa, while she herself stood by

vith Walter in her arms — Lindsay's kind old-maid's ırms, always open to "ither folks' bairns" Hope leaned ıer tired head in the same place where she had rested or hours and days, when she was recovering from the ever. It seemed to comfort her — her tears flowed nore softly, and her aspect had less of wild misery.

"I feel safe now," she sighed. "Nobody will be ınkind to me here. Nobody will ever take away my »aby. Ah, we may be content, Walter and I."

She turned, holding one hand to Ninian and the other o Lindsay, just as she had used to do when in old times ying on that sofa. Miss Græme kissed her and wept; »ut Ninian, just touching her offered hand and speaking . few words that were inaudible, went softly away.

That night, when the mother and child were gone o rest, in the same room where Hope and Tinie used to leep, or sometimes to lie awake half the night chattering — Ninian told his sister the whole story, strange as ıction, yet true as many an agonising history that we ıeet with in real life. The simple-minded Lindsay ould hardly believe in the existence of so much guilt. She kept silent with horror, only repeating now and hen "that it was a wicked, wicked world."

"It is," said Ninian, "and therefore in future we must hield her from it."

"We will indeed. But how?"

"She has no home anywhere," continued the brother. Though she has done nothing morally wrong, yet while he lives — and that poor child — nothing can take way the disgrace from both. She must keep away from he world, and live quietly with those that know her to e innocent, who will care for her tenderly, and never »rsake her. Do you understand me, sister?"

"Not quite," said Lindsay, still bewildered with the tale.

"I mean — she must live always with us here."

Lindsay uttered a glad affirmation — then suddenly paused and looked anxiously at her brother. He changed colour, but only for a moment, and went on firmly:

"She must live with us as a dear and sorrow-stricken sister, who, though she can never know happiness, may at least know peace, perhaps even through our means. We will comfort her, and bring up her child, poor desolate boy that he is! And perhaps, when he has grown a man, he may succeed me in my office, and be a credit to his old bachelor uncle after all."

"Ninian!" was all that Lindsay said. But as she looked at his face, which first hid its quiverings beneath a smile and then grew serene and brave — her eyes were streaming over. Silently the brother and sister grasped each other's hands, reading each other's hearts the while. Thus the compact was sealed.

They sat together for an hour longer, talking over every needful arrangement: Lindsay now and then recurring to many a point in the strange history — especially the time when John Forsyth had sought Rachel's hand, and been refused.

"Does he likewise know the truth?" asked she.

"I think not. I did not see him after that night when his cousin refused him admittance. He left London abruptly."

"He is in Edinburgh this week, I think," said Lindsay. "He promised to come and see me soon. I am glad, for he is a good man and a minister; he will help us to comfort Hope."

Ninian looked doubtful, but had not time to answer,

before, to his astonishment, the door opened, and Hope herself came in.

She had evidently just risen from bed, and thrown on a white dressing-gown. She was ghastly pale, and seemed full of alarm.

"I am glad you are here. I heard you talking," she cried breathlessly. "Lindsay, come up stairs; there is something the matter with my baby."

She always said "*my* baby," with a touching emphasis of maternal right; now she said it in an agony.

Lindsay followed her, and Ninian too, for the poor mother's terror gave him a presentiment of evil.

There had been a fire lit in Lindsay's dressing-room; by its last embers sat the nurse, with little Walter lying across her knees. The baby's face and limbs were deadly white; and though he was quite awake there seemed a dim haze over his blue eyes, always so bright and intelligent.

"He has lain so a long time. He is not in pain — he does not cry. What can ail him, Lindsay?" whispered Hope, imploringly.

Now, Miss Græme was an old maid, set apart from mother's joys and mother's terrors; but she had in the course of her lifetime gathered up much of that knowledge concerning sickness which all women ought to acquire, not knowing when or how often it may be needed. She saw at a glance that there was coming on Hope's darling that most terrible disease of infancy — convulsions.

"What is the matter with him?" again groaned Hope. "I am so young and ignorant, I know scarcely anything about children. And he has been so healthy all his little life. Oh, my baby! my baby!"

She threw herself on her knees and kissed the little cold limbs, that now began to stir and writhe frightfully. She snatched him and tried to hold him still; but in vain. Her eyes, half-glazed with terror, sought Miss Græme's.

Lindsay, like many another timid woman, had always full presence of mind in cases of sickness and emergency. She gave her orders at once for the necessary remedies, and began to undress the struggling child.

"Do not be frightened, Hope. I know what it is. I have seen Esther's little girl the same, and she recovered. Many a child recovers from convulsions."

At the word Hope shrieked aloud.

"Keep quiet," said Ninian, in her half-insensible ear. "Trust in God. I will go and fetch help."

It was a long time before he came back, for he had to go some distance, and the hour was so late — or rather early. Dawn was peeping when he and the surgeon he succeeded in bringing came back to The Gowans.

The first fit of convulsions had subsided, and the boy was somewhat better. He lay in his bath — the water glistening over his little limbs, that were white almost as those of a dead child. His eyes, too, were shut in exhaustion. His mother knelt beside him, with a face from which every ray of consciousness had vanished, save that which drew her gaze to him.

"Will he live? Will he live?" was all she murmured.

The doctor looked grave, though not very grave; most people think so little of the death of infant children. No one feels that but the mother, to whom the scarcely-begun life — so lately one with her own — is as precious as any fully developed existence.

"Will he live?" again rung the broken-hearted cry.

"He may; we'll hope so. Children get through so

much," said the surgeon, kindly. — He was the same who had attended at The Gowans during the fever, and knew Hope well.

"Mrs. Ulverston's only child, I see," he whispered to Ninian. "A son and heir! That is hard, but we must hope for the best. Does the father know?"

Hope's ear caught the word. "No," she cried, frantically. "My child has no one but me, and I no one but him. Oh, save him for me — my love! my darling! my beautiful boy!"

The doctor made no reply, but looked anxiously at the poor babe, whose state of death-like exhaustion began to change into another convulsive fit worse than the last. For half an hour did these four — Lindsay, Ninian, the surgeon, and the unfortunate mother — watch that spectacle so agonising, so hopeless of relief — the dumb struggles of a dying child. Hope's misery sank into mute despair. There was no more crying and tears; she seemed quite paralysed. At, last, when all remedies had been tried and failed, she lifted little Walter out of the bath.

Lindsay would have interfered, but the doctor said, "No, let her!" And by his look they knew that all hope was over — that the mother was only taking her baby in her arms to die.

The feeble breath lingered a few minutes still. Hope had time to press her last kisses on the little breast and the round limbs already growing cold. During a momentary pause of consciousness, the baby-lips, that would never learn to speak, turned instinctively to seek and cling to the maternal bosom. Then came a last, long, writhing struggle, and in that struggle the child died.

For nearly an hour Hope sat with the little pale body on her knee, and would not believe that this was death.

Once Lindsay ventured to touch it, and the look the mother turned was frantic — furious. The surgeon quietly left the room; when he was gone, Lindsay undrew the curtains and let in day, thinking that perhaps the light would reveal a truth which she herself had not courage to utter.

It did so. The mother saw the baby-form and baby-face, which, all struggle now over, were sinking into the beautiful likeness which dead infants wear. So beautiful, and yet so solemn was it, that she made no outcry — only she looked up with a sort of bewildered questioning.

"Tell her," whispered Ninian. "Go and take it from her." — *It* — only *it*, now! —

Lindsay tried to speak and could not. Tender-hearted ever, she could "weep with those that weep," but a task like this was beyond her power.

It was Ninian's part to do it — he in whose hand Fate seemed to have laid every arrow that must be guided into the beloved heart.

He went up to her, and touched her shoulder.

"Hope," he said; but the face that was sharply raised to his made him dumb. Of his own words, what could he say? So he only uttered those consecrated of old by the deepest affliction, and balm to all other affliction since: "*The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord!*"

His manner, his voice — low, but firm, controlled the mourner inexpressibly. She suffered him to take the little corpse from her knees, and give it to the nurse.

"Come," he said, in a tremulous voice, as with grave tenderness he put his arm round her, while his sister supported her on the other side, — "come to Lindsay and me."

And Hope came.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THERE are many griefs which the world calls awful calamities, but which are borne by pure natures with a wonderful calmness. These miseries, termed by false pietists "visitations," "chastisements," yet which, nevertheless, often seem strangely to light upon the most innocent of earth — ought to be measured, not in themselves, but through the medium of their infliction, and according to the character of those on whom they fall. Thus only can we reconcile to ourselves the justice of those misfortunes which seem outwardly the relentless hand of Providence crushing its creatures at will, while inwardly the sufferer feels that Hand as a soothing weight, cold yet soft, solemn, yet peaceful. And howsoever heavy it may lie, there is something of awful repose in knowing that it is the visible hand of God.

Thus Hope, though at one blow made husbandless and childless, was even by the double force of the stroke enabled more patiently to bear it. In one sense there was mercy in the death of the babe, taken in his innocence from evil to come. The mother, amidst all her affliction, seemed dimly to comprehend this; since more than once, among the few words she uttered during the first day when the child "*was not*," Ninian heard the touching expression, "Now, nobody will ever taunt my boy with having no father."

Towards evening she grew more composed, wandered quietly about the house, which could only remind her of

her girlish days; and bore no token of her brief joys of motherhood — none save the little marble image that she went to look at from time to time, and each time came back more full of awful calm, as if that likeness made her think less of the baby she had lost from her earthly arms, than of the angel she had that day given unto Heaven.

She was very ill too, and physical illness is oftentimes a great blessing. Lindsay had been terrified in looking forward to the hour when the poor mother would have to go to rest and miss the "wee birdie" nestling to her bosom; but when evening came, Hope, feverish and worn, suffered herself to be put to bed; and Miss Græme took her place beside, to spend the night in watching.

Next morning Ninian went out early to fulfil the brotherly duty of finding a grave for the child. He chose the Dean Cemetery, thinking Hope would like best that her darling should be laid to sleep in such a sweet spot. On the way thither — emerging out of one of the mean streets that still neigbour the Dean Bridge — he met John Forsyth.

It was their first time of meeting since they had walked together to Mrs. Armadale's door. Ninian wondered whether Forsyth would bear any grudge against him, but the young minister's greeting, always cold, was not more so than ordinary.

"I wanted to see you," said he shortly to Ninian — "I will walk with you. Where are you going?"

Mr. Græme told him.

"A child's grave only? Well — happy the child that dies so young! Is it one of your sisters' infants?"

"Not my twin-sisters'" — said Ninian, reluctant to explain further.

Forsyth seemed indifferent. He was apparently in a restless state, and walked a good way without speaking, until his friend asked kindly —

"Tell me, John, how you have been all this while? And what did you want to see me about? I have time for a long talk to-day."

"But I have not," replied Forsyth, abruptly, and, turning round, he fixed his keen eyes on his friend's face. "Where is my cousin Rachel?"

Ninian was somewhat startled. "You have heard nothing of her?"

"No — not since the night when she admitted you, and spurned me."

"Nay — not spurned, John."

"I say she did. The message must have come from her own mouth. She desired me never to visit her again, neither as her cousin nor as a minister. So I took that for a sign that she was one doomed. I shook off the dust of my feet against her, and left her in her iniquity."

"Do not be so hard, John. You will know the truth one day."

"What truth? Again I say — where is my cousin Rachel?"

"Why do you wish to know?"

"To keep some one else from knowing. There has been a man here, seeking me at my mother's house, trying to find out all he can about her. But little good he got — the villain."

"How do you know this? Who is he?"

"A friend of yours; Mr. Ulverston."

Even before Forsyth answered, Ninian had guessed as much. What could be the reason of Ulverston's coming? Was it that, meeting Rachel in her new beauty, and moreover in her intense and scornful hate, some strange contradiction had again rekindled the passion of his boyhood? Would he wish to pacify and reclaim her as his wife — or else to gather evidence that might prove his safeguard in the forthcoming law-trial? In any case, it was important that Ninian should be acquainted with what had passed at the Forsyths'.

"John," said he, earnestly, "Mr. Ulverston is not my friend. I call him a villain, and know him to be such: but what reason had you for that opinion?"

"Because the world 'lieth in wickedness,' and I read his in his face. Besides, as the world itself would say, when a man — a fine gentleman — leaves his young wife and goes seeking about for a play-actress, are not the chances great that he is a villain? I would have told him that, and nothing more: but I was from home; and my poor mother has a wilful tongue. So he learnt all she knew."

"About Rachel's past life?"

"Ah," and a light tremulousness of voice betrayed that Forsyth was not quite so hardened to all pity as he seemed. "Of the days when she was an innocent girl at the Border — of the fever she had, and her delusions about being married. When my mother told of that, Ulverston laughed, and said it was a story he had heard before. If I knew why he said so, or how he learnt it!"

"I know," said Ninian; "I knew years ago, but was pledged to secrecy. It was no delusion. She *was* even then married, and Ulverston was her husband."

Forsyth started, and his sallow features were overspread with a livid hue. They had just reached the cemetery-gate; he clung to it, as if unable to support himself. Then baring his head, he murmured aloud,

"I thank Thee, O my God! — Thou hast been very merciful to me, a sinner!"

Awe-struck, it was some minutes before he could say more. Ninian took him into the cemetery, and they sat down on a grave.

"You have been saved from misery, Forsyth," said he, "but not so with others. The story is an awful one. Will you hear it?"

The young minister bowed his head in assent; he seemed quite overpowered. As briefly as he could Ninian related the whole; ending with that of the unhappy mother, for whose child he was now come to provide a grave. But, as was natural enough, John Forsyth scarcely heeded that part of the history.

"Has he acknowledged her?" he said, hoarsely. "Will she now be made his lawful wife before the world?"

"Do you mean Rachel? — I cannot tell. He seems unwilling still. If so, there must be a trial, which will force him to right her."

"*I* will force him! You talk of human law — I will compel him by the law of God — I will hurl upon him the anathemas of God's minister. It is true," added the enthusiast, standing erect, "I *am* God's minister. Whomsoever I bind is bound and whomsoever I loose is loosed indeed. If he repents, and I pray for him, he may be forgiven; if he repents not, and I curse him, the curse will fall!"

So speaking, with a solemnity that was appalling, he moved forward to the gate. Ninian stopped him.

"How can you find this man? Is he in Edinburgh?"

"He is; my mother knows where."

"But you will only speak to him concerning Rachel. You will not tell him that poor Hope is here; or let him come to torture her in her grief or molest the grave of his dead child?"

"No," answered Forsyth. "These are nothing to me. They are innocent; I have to do only with the guilty."

He quitted the spot abruptly, leaving Ninian to calm himself from all the world's cares in this quiet place of graves, and there to find one grave more for the little being who was safe taken out of all earth's passions, misery, and sin. And, as often happens when we feel ourselves tangled in a maze of trouble for which there seems no end, Ninian almost envied the blessed lot of the innocent who had thus dropped softly from its mother's breast into the tomb.

But such thoughts were not likely to rest permanently in a mind like his, whose energies always rose according as they were needed. He went to his office, and then home — to a silent house, for Hope still continued ill in bed, though there was no fear of danger. On the whole it was best thus, since to have seen her would only have added to the cares which were heavy upon him. And well he knew that for any great sorrow there is at first no such thing as consolation; that the wisest sympathy the most tender friend can give, is only, "Weep on, I weep likewise."

Towards evening he felt so restless to know what was the result of Forsyth's interview with Mr. Ulverston, that he walked out towards his friend's lodgings by the Calton Hill. Passing the theatre, he was thunderstruck to see posted up in large letters, "For this night, and the week following, the celebrated London actress, Mrs. Armadale."

She was then in Edinburgh, and acting! It seemed almost incredible, until he reflected that she must of necessity come to arrange concerning the proceedings in the Court of Session; and that her only means for carrying on her case were those derived from her profession. As for the pain or revulsion of feeling from acting during such a crisis, a woman of her fierce will could, as she said "do anything." Her arrival must have been sudden though, or John Forsyth would never have had need for the question, "Where is my cousin Rachel?"

"Still — if he does not see the announcement, I will not tell him," thought Ninian. "It could do no good."

Mr. Forsyth was not at home, but he came in shortly afterwards. He looked frightfully haggard and much excited.

"I am glad you are here," cried he; "you will tell me what to do."

"How? Have you seen Ulverston?"

"I have. I followed him, found him, accused him. But he will not right her. He called me fanatic — madman — fool; still I bore it; I urged upon him God's law, and he made a mock of it. Now, I will bring upon him the law of man. I told him so."

"You mean, that you will lodge an information against him for criminally marrying a second wife, his first being alive; that so he may be arrested and brought to trial?"

"That is it. I do not understand these things of the world. I would have dealt with him according to God and His judgments, but he is hardened. Listen," continued Forsyth, in excited tones: "I gave him to his face

the 'Anathema Maranatha,' and he never blenched. Can it be that Heaven's justice sleeps?"

"It never sleeps."

"Can it be that I must smite him, not only with the arm of the Lord, but with an arm of flesh?" cried he, in a tone that made Ninian shudder.

"John Forsyth, you cannot mean — no, it is impossible! You only mean that you will accuse him openly and have him punished by the law of the land? But you cannot do it; you forget the marriage is not proved. Until that is done, no judge would listen to you for a moment."

Forsyth's countenance fell.

"It is strange — I cannot fathom it. Can it be God's will thus to let the guilty go unpunished?"

"No," said Ninian, thinking to moderate that ruthless condemnation which seemed the faith into which the young minister, once so gentle, had hardened. "No; but it may be God's will that the guilty should live to repent and atone."

Forsyth was silent. He seemed touched by this recurrence to a doctrine which had once been his own — the doctrine of forgiveness and love.

"Come," Ninian continued, "let us take a walk together; we will both grow quiet then."

He led him, intentionally, so as to avoid the theatre, round the Calton Hill, and down the slope that leads towards Leith. At the head of Leith-walk, Forsyth drew back from his arm.

"There he is — there!"

A gentleman, passing in a carriage, had just put his head out, and shouted to the driver, in an angry voice, "Quick — to Leith Pier." It was Mr. Ulverston.

"Did you hear — Leith Pier!" said Forsyth. "My threats alarmed him, and he means to escape. He will go on board one of the foreign steamers that are lying there, and I shall never find him again."

Ninian thought this deduction by no means clear, but it was so firmly fixed in the other's excited mind, that opposition seemed useless.

"I will go and stop him," Forsyth continued. "Once more I will try persuasions — entreaties; if these fail, my curse, which I hold from God, shall follow him over God's seas. And then," he added, sinking his voice awfully, "I should not marvel if there came to this vile man — in all but the rescue — the fate of Jonah."

"Hush, John," said Ninian, inexpressibly shocked. He determined, whithersoever the young minister went, to follow him.

It was already dusk when they reached the pier of Leith. The tide was near high-water, and coming in heavily. A sharp east gale blew over the Firth and cleared off the mist, so that along the opposite coast of Fife the lights of Kirkaldy and Burntisland were dimly visible.

"He must be somewhere on the pier. Let us follow," said John Forsyth, dragging his friend onward.

It was an idle chance, Ninian thought, but soon his mind misgave him for using the word — a word often so blindly uttered even by those who feel most deeply that in the lightest affairs of life there is an unerring Providence ruling over all.

Lounging about with a cigar in his mouth, and recognisable in the dusk less by his appearance than by his English voice, as he talked to a boatman, was the very man they sought — Geoffrey Ulverston.

Forsyth walked up and addressed him by name. Ulverston started, and at first seemed more alarmed than angry. But seeing that his pursuer was alone — for Ninian, unwilling to be mixed up in the matter, had held back — he became more courageous.

"What do you mean by dogging a gentleman's steps in this manner? You have said your say, and I have answered it. Can't you let me alone?"

"No," said Forsyth, solemnly, and by the sound of his voice Ninian knew what strong control he was exercising over himself. "It is not I that speak, but One who will never let a man like you alone, until it is too late and his time is come. Once more, will you hear me?"

"Hear you? That is too good — an open-air preaching on Leith Pier!" laughed the young man. "Preach away then; and if you convert me you can end with an extempore baptism, washing away all my sins in the water of the Forth. But make haste, for the boat sails in half an hour."

"You are going then, and will not do your wife justice!"

"Bah! — Am I to walk into Edinburgh Theatre to-night, point to the fine painted creature that is entertaining the galleries, and say, 'Ladies and gentlemen, this is my wife, Mrs. Ulverston!' Nay, my good fellow, you must be a complete visionary to expect such a thing."

While he spoke, beneath the ridicule and bravado of this speech lurked a tone of uneasiness and vexation. But apparently he was afraid to commence open hostilities with John Forsyth, who on his part was struck dumb by the announcement that Rachel was so near.

"You did not know she was here, I suppose?" said Ulverston, ironically. "A strange thing — considering what used to be. Very odd, that you should try so hard to force upon me as a wife the woman you yourself once wished to marry! How do I know that it is not a plot between you both?"

"My God — my God — Thou seest me!" groaned John Forsyth. And once more, as if that old and bitter remembrance goaded him to further energy, he launched out against Ulverston all the persuasions, warnings, and abjurations by which he was accustomed to call sinners to repentance.

They walked forward, and their voices died away in silence. Ninian remained, unwilling to follow, and yet afraid to leave the spot. He watched them moving forward as far as was practicable on the still unfinished pier, until blocks, stones, and the *débris* of workmen impeded their passage. A most unsafe place it was for two men heedless of their steps, and engaged in excited talk. It was a great relief to Ninian when he saw them turn.

He determined to wait until they came up. Loud above the sound of the waves he heard their angry voices, for the pier was almost deserted, and the spot where even he himself stood was far out into the Firth. He stood and watched the two figures, both too indistinct to be recognised, except that he saw they walked, — as such bitter foes naturally would walk, — as far asunder as the pier allowed; one being under the east wall, the other lounging along the unprotected edge on the opposite side. They were near enough for Ninian to hear — not their words, but the tone of their voices. That of Forsyth was loud and stern, such as he used in the anathemas

of vengeance which he believed himself deputed to bear. Ulverston's was furious with rage.

Suddenly it ceased. Ninian strained his eyes through the dusk, — of the two advancing figures he now only saw *one*.

In a moment the truth flashed upon him. That bare verge — the stones slippery with rain — the footing of both rendered unsteady by excitement — a single false step, and in a moment either would be plunged over into the waves.

Thus, doubtless, one had fallen, but which?

Quick as lightning Ninian was at the spot. There was a man standing, gazing blankly upon the sea.

"John Forsyth! You did not —"

"No," he said, in hollow tones, "I did not do it — God forbid I should! But I cursed him — and God heard!"

Paralysed with horror, Forsyth staggered back against the wall. There was not a moment to be lost. Ninian saw a few people moving on the pier; with all his might he shouted for help, and almost instantaneously help came.

"A boat, quick! He can swim, I know. Hold up, Ulverston!" shouted he, over the dusky water.

"Swimming's little use," said a gentleman near. "The tide runs high, and he may be dashed against the wooden framework. It must have been so, or he would have answered when you shouted."

Ninian hesitated no more, but threw off his coat and leaped into the water. It was a frantic, perhaps needless, exposure of life. He might not have suffered another to do it, nor perhaps have done it himself for a

stranger, but to stand and see an enemy perish seemed something little short of murder.

Heaven was merciful, though not to him was vouchsafed the preservation of his foe. Ulverston was quickly found, and dragged into the boat; but some minutes elapsed before Ninian, buffeted about in the waves, was likewise rescued from danger.

All the while Forsyth stood looking on, ghastly, terrified, feeble as a woman. When his enemy came to life again, there broke out the audible thanksgivings, even tears, of this man, who was not born to be the stern fanatic he had become.

Ulverston opened his eyes in the lighthouse on the pier. He had escaped drowning, nor, though he was a good deal bruised, was there upon him any visible wound. Still, something was wrong, and he did not recover his senses as clearly as might have been expected from the short time he had been immersed. He could scarcely speak intelligibly, and at every touch he groaned.

"Has he any friends?" some one hinted; "he may have received some internal injury that we do not know of. Take him home."

At the word home, Ulverston had turned his dulled eyes round; they met no faces he knew, but those of the two men whom he believed his implacable foes. Once more he bitterly groaned. He had learned the lesson which the wicked must surely one day learn — that for them in their time of sickness and death there are neither friends nor home.

Ninian reflected a minute. So free would have been his own forgiveness, that he could at once have taken Ulverston to The Gowans, but for Hope. However, in any case, the distance made such a removal imprac-

ticable. There was no alternative but to convey the exhausted man to the only home open to him — the nearest inn.

There, after much apparent suffering, he lay, extended upon the bed from which, as his fast changing look foretold, he would rise up no more.

"Will he die after all?" muttered Forsyth in an agony, as the surgeon pronounced the injury to be of some internal kind — produced no doubt by dashing against the piles under the pier. "Will he die? And Thou, God, givest me this misery because I arrogated to myself Thy power of doom!"

"It was an accident, John," said his friend, soothingly.

"Ay, — but of my causing. In calm blood he might have walked there safely. I angered him, and in his rage he stumbled and fell. Oh, my God! — and with all his guilt upon his head I have sent this sinner unto Thee."

He paused, overcome, and then burst forth again:

"There is another thing; — if he dies, he can make no atonement. And she loved him too! Oh Rachel! my cousin Rachel!"

"Hush," said Ninian, "he will hear you — nay, he has already heard."

It was so. The sound of this name — which might once have been dear — seemed to pierce the stupor in which Ulverston lay. His half-open eyes sought Ninian's, and his lips moved.

Mr. Græme approached him. "Can I do anything for you? You know I will do it; anything — everything. Treat me like a friend."

Ulverston tried to speak, and after some difficulty pronounced the words, "Bring Rachel!"

The voice — the look — were that of a dying man. Ay, that very concession and entreaty convinced Ninian that he was dying, and knew it.

As fast as possible Mr. Græme drove to the theatre, on the stage of which this very hour Rachel was probably acting. As he came to the wings, he saw her; — he heard the delighted laughter of the audience over *Beatrice* — Shakspeare's *Beatrice* — the only comic part in which Mrs. Armadale excelled. Gaily she was chasing the *Benedick* — in and out — until she came to the side-entrance, and saw Mr. Græme. He touched her arm, and addressed her by name.

Rachel's countenance was lit with anger, as she said in an under tone — "Why are you here?"

"I am sent to fetch you — you must return with me immediately."

"Whither?"

"I will tell you as we go."

She turned aside haughtily. "This is insufferable, if not ridiculous." And noticing that a few supernumeraries were gazing curiously at the rencontre, she added, "I will see you to-morrow, Mr. Græme; I must return to the stage now."

"You cannot! Listen!" he whispered; — "I come from Mr. Ulverston. He is not well; he wishes — entreats — to see you."

She laughed triumphantly. "Entreats? — Then let him wait." And she moved on, for the audience were getting impatient. Once more Ninian tried to detain her, without telling her the plain truth, which, if any ray of womanly feeling lingered in her breast, might be a

startling shock. But his attempts were vain, and at last the manager came to her rescue.

"This is impossible, sir. Whatever cause there be, an audience will not be trifled with; we cannot stop the play."

"You must!" said Ninian's imperative voice, loud enough for all near to hear him. "Tell the audience that Mrs. Armadale is sent for to her husband — who is dying."

The words reached Rachel's ear just when she was beginning to utter one of the brilliant sallies of *Beatrice*. She stopped, gasped, staggered off the stage, and fell senseless.

"She loved him!" said Ninian to himself, as, scarcely waiting to recover her, he bore her away unopposed. "She loves him even until now."

When placed in a carriage, Rachel came to herself entirely. With cautious kindness Ninian broke to her all that had happened. She sat still, and never answered a word. He thought that all her hardness was coming back, until, lifting her out at the inn-door, he saw that her whole frame was collapsing and shivering.

"Will you go up now?" he said. "I fear there is no time to lose."

Rachel bent her head — the feathery head-dress of *Beatrice* was still nodding there. Ninian touched it.

"Take off this," he said, gently. "Do not let him see you so."

With quivering hands she tore off her head-tire, and threw it on the ground; then drew over her bare arms and gleaming neck an old shawl that some one had brought to her in the theatre, and followed Ninian to the door of the room where Ulverston lay.

There she paused. — "I vowed once, that if he lay dying, and asked me to cross the threshold to him, I would not come."

"That was an evil vow. You will come nevertheless?"

Still she hesitated, as if the fierce revenge into which her love had merged were not conquered yet. While she lingered, there was a groan heard within. — The next moment she had entered, and walked with trembling steps to the foot of the bed.

"You sent for me — I am come."

These few words she said in a hard, clear voice. While saying them, she caught sight of the dying man — the face once looked up to as to that of an angel — the face wept over during many a vigil of sickness — the face that had lain close against her bosom, as if there she could ward off death — then feared, now close at hand!

She saw, and all the woman came into her again. She flung herself beside the bed, and her tears poured out in floods.

Ulverston opened his eyes, looked upon her, and faintly smiled. His consciousness was evidently failing fast.

"Geoffrey, speak to me," she frantically cried, throwing one arm over him, and drawing his round her neck. "Speak to your poor Rachel that loves you — that always loved you! Only one word!"

The dying man tried to raise himself up, though he did not look at her but at Ninian and Forsyth, who were standing near. He seemed collecting all his energies for speech. At last he gasped out, as if every word were a dying breath —

"Remember — both of you — this is my wife — Rachel!"

His head sank back — his eyes closed slowly, never to open more.

"Kiss me, Geoffrey — kiss me, my husband!" cried Rachel, laying her head on the pillow beside him. He smiled again — his lips slightly moved. Hers clung to them — wildly — closely; clung until long after those she pressed were cold.

Geoffrey Ulverston was dead! The All-merciful had taken his soul to do with it as pleased Him. Its future no other living soul had a right to judge.

"Yet," whispered Ninian to John Forsyth, who knelt by the bedside praying — ay, and as he prayed, weeping like a woman, though the woman near him wept not — "Yet, since he repented towards her, he may also have repented towards Heaven. If she could forgive him, surely a Diviner One may."

The young minister groaned "Amen!" He rose from his knees by that death-bed a changed and humbled man. The divine spirit of his youth returned to him; he became again, in all his acts and doctrines, a very likeness of the mild, meek, loving Apostle John.

After he was gone, Ninian stood alone by the husband and wife, whose two heads still lay on the same pillow, both so white and motionless that it could hardly be told which was the dead and which the living. Rachel's eyes had never opened since Ulverston died. He had died softly, without pain or convulsion; so probably she had not even known that his spirit was gone.

Death in a young man — strong, handsome, full of life, without any previous sickness to sharpen the check,

or waste the frame — is a thing once seen never to be forgotten. It is the awful hand of Omnipotence laid upon all the currents of life, saying, "Peace, be still!" and in a moment, as it were, the grand organisation of man, with all its physical and mental perfection, becomes a mere image of clay. It is a sight to make one not weep, but shudder — a sight that afterwards, in all times and in all places, will come back and force itself upon the memory — a vision of death in all its horror and with none of its sublime calm, until the survivor's only comfort is to bow in the dust, and cry, "*Verily, there is a God that judgeth righteously — verily, there is a God that ruleth in the earth.*"

Ninian looked at the dead face of the man who had once been, if not his friend, at least his familiar acquaintance, and who had since become the only enemy he had in the world — the only one of whom he felt that the world would appear brighter to him if no longer cumbered by that man's footsteps. It was so now. Enmity, disgust, and vengeance were alike ended. The very name of Geoffrey Ulverston would be silent for ever — silent as a name must be which leaves no blessing behind it.

He closed the glassy eyes, his own being dim the while. Gently he moved the head away from Rachel's, and parted their two hands — one clasping so warm and tight, the other closing rigidly and cold. This solemn division of life from death roused the miserable woman.

She rose and looked fixedly at him. — There, to his horror, he saw the peculiar look — banished for years from her face, but which he well remembered.

"Why do you disturb me?" she said, in an angry

whisper. "Don't you see my husband is asleep? And I, too, am so tired — so tired."

She touched gently the brown hair of the dead man — Ninian had turned the face away — and laid her cheek again on the pillow.

"He has been very ill, you know. He will sleep a long time yet, I hope. You had better go away and leave us."

Ninian was startled, — except that it was possible this misery might have stunned her faculties for the moment, and made her hysterical or delirious. He felt her wrist, but its pulses were quite calm. He determined to arouse her to the truth.

"Your husband is not asleep, Rachel," said he, sorrowfully. "Look at him — touch him. Now, my poor girl, do you understand?"

She leaned over, and looked long at the face, whose muscles were slowly settling into repose. Despite the hue of death, the thick brown hair and curling beard, hiding the fallen mouth, gave it a lifelike aspect.

Rachel smiled fondly. "How very handsome Geoffrey looks when he is asleep! I always told him so." She stooped, kissed the forehead, and for a moment drew back.

"He is very cold — but so am I too," and she shivered. "This is such a hard winter; my feet were quite frozen in the snow as I came."

"Rachel — listen to me."

But she only motioned him to be silent, and took her place beside the bed, holding one of the lifeless hands with a contented, unconscious smile.

There was a noise at the door; Jane Sedley tottered in, and ran hastily towards her mistress, sobbing.

"My darling! I could not find you before, and now they tell me it is too late."

"Oh no," she whispered, cheerfully. "Not at all too late. He has wanted nothing; you see he is sound asleep."

Ninian and the old servant looked at one another, and then at the wretched wife — the widow now — who sat smiling at them both. The expression of that vacant smile could not be mistaken. The shock had brought back the disease latent in her brain; — she was once more mad.

Mr. Græme, awe-struck by the spectacle, could find no words; Jane Sedley clung to her beloved mistress, weeping as if her faithful heart were like to break.

"Don't cry, don't cry," said Rachel, gently putting her away. "It will disturb him — and he is so much better. Indeed, I am quite happy now."

"It may be, God knows!" thought Ninian; and he saw mercy even in the sudden taking away of that reason, whose only awakening would have been to such an unfathomable, irremediable woe.

He went to poor old Jane Sedley, and tried to comfort her, but in vain. She stood moaning, sometimes over the dead — towards whom even her hatred had melted into pity — and then again over that spectacle, sadder still, the living dead. Many minutes were thus spent; until at last Rachel spoke.

"What o'clock is it?"

It was early morning, almost daybreak. They told her so. She seemed troubled.

"Ah! — and he will not wake — and I must be going soon!"

"Ay," said Ninian; and seizing at her words, he whispered to Jane Sedley, that under this pretence she might be removed from the room.

"How soon will my husband wake, do you think, Jane?" again asked Rachel. "It's hard to go without one kiss — and yet the farm is such a weary distance."

"She thinks herself nursing him at my cottage, as she used to do. Oh, my poor girl!"

— It was a scene more touching than any mad scene the renowned actress had ever played!

"Speak to her — persuade her to leave him," whispered Ninian, as he drew back out of sight. The old woman, conquering her tears, obeyed.

"I know — I know," answered Rachel. "Let me alone — I'll go soon!"

A few minutes longer she sat watching the beloved features, which at times seemed almost to stir in the stirring shadows of the lamplight. Tears, one after the other, came stealing down her face — tears not of grief, but tenderness.

"Oh, Geoffrey," she murmured. "How I love you, my Geoffrey! I dreamt — I suppose when I was asleep, a little while ago — that I had been very angry with you; but it is all over now! What a foolish, foolish girl I was!"

"Come," said Mrs. Sedley, "it's quite time."

"I am coming! You'll be sure to take great care of him till I am here again to-morrow night? Tell him I would not wake him, but that I kissed him before I went away. — No," she added, pausing as she stooped, "I think I will not kiss him. It might disturb him, and he is so sound asleep."

So with many lingering looks of farewell — an eternal farewell, given tenderly and with smiles — she contentedly quitted the room, followed by Jane Sedley.

Ninian was left alone with the dead.

* * * * * *

CHAPTER XIX.

"HERE is news!" said Mr. Græme, as he entered cheerily the parlour at The Gowans. "Charlie's ship is lying in Leith Roads. He will be at home to-morrow."

"Oh, brother!" eagerly cried the two women who sat working together. They both called him "brother," though one only had any right to use the name.

"Yes, he will really come — our sailor laddie, who has been all round the world. I wonder, will he be much changed? Let me see, how long has he been away?"

"Two years last Christmas; he sailed the week Tinie's little girl was born," said a low voice.

The speaker was Hope. She sat at the window, making a child's frock. She could do so now, without any tears falling on the work. Her expression, if grave, was yet serene and sweet; she had outlived all agony — all shame. Even her sorrow was over now; and, though she could never again be the merry Hope Ansted, whose girlhood had scarcely known a cloud, still she was not unhappy.

God is very merciful to those who have to suffer early. It is almost incredible — the power of renewed life in a heart still young. A pure spirit, though crushed by whatsoever weight, will continually rise, if not to joy, always to resignation and peace. It is a truth which we would fain all preachers preached, all poets sang, all authors taught — that no grief is of

itself incurable — that God never meant His creatures, unto whom in His wisdom He has dealt affliction, to pass a long lifetime of despair. Sooner or later the balm will come; and soonest unto guileless, gentle natures — as was Hope's.

"Is that frock for Tinie's daughter?" said Ninian, as at the sound of the low voice he turned and walked towards her.

"No," she answered, looking up to him and smiling — a smile the more sweet, that it was still pensive. "Little Agnes has outgrown my skill. This is for her wee brother, the new comer. I must get it done quickly, that it may be ready for the baptism to-morrow.

"You are very neat-handed, Hope, and very kind." He said no more, but stood leaning against the window, watching her at her work.

The manner of both showed how solemnly during the time — more than two years — that they had lived in the same house together, Ninian had observed the pledge he made to himself when the desolate girl came for shelter to his home. He had respected her sorrow — to this day she wholly was ignorant of his love. A love that, when her eyes were off him and her notice otherwise directed, was visible in his every look, every turn; — a love that as the sanctity of her grief wore away, as, so young still — her beauty dawned again, making the brief time of her wifehood and motherhood to seem like a dream — grew strong, passionate, and wild. How great had been his self-control, and how frightfully he had sometimes suffered in the ordeal of a position that hardly one man in a thousand could endure and conquer, Heaven alone knew!

It had made him grow old before his time, as such

conflicts always do. His head was grey ere he had counted more than forty years. Still, at intervals — for in every heroic and virtuous struggle intervals of peace will come — he had known great content. And there was one source of comfort ever open to him, to feel that amidst all his own agonies he had succeeded in bringing comfort to *her*.

"Shall you be going down to Portobello to-night, brother?" said Hope, suddenly. "If so, don't tell Mrs. Reay anything of this frock. I mean it for a surprise." And she shook out the beautiful lace, looking at her handiwork in feminine pride, until slowly — slowly — deeper thoughts came over her. Her lip began to quiver. Perhaps she was thinking of her own brief motherhood — perhaps of the robes, whiter and fairer than earthly mother's hands could fashion, which her little angel in heaven wore now.

"Hope!" said Ninian, tenderly, for he had long learned to watch and read every change in her countenance.

"Yes, I understand!" she faltered. "I am quite content — quite. And Tinie says I shall have her boy, to call him what name I like, and keep him for my pet and godson — English fashion. I shall love him very much, and he may be a great comfort to me when I grow old."

Ninian was silent.

Soon after, he quitted the house for one of his journeys, made every week to a solitary but pretty dwelling that lay under the slope of Corstorphine Hill. It had a large garden, almost large enough to be a pleasure-ground, with high walls that entirely secluded the inmates from the view of passers-by.

This seclusion was necessary. In one of those inmates, and there were but three — Heaven had seen fit

to close the doors of the soul even as the gates of the outer world were closed upon the body. From that living grave, awful, yet restful, neither body nor soul would ever come out more. Never, until God unloosed the prison-house of clay, and took unto Himself the darkened spirit which He of His mercy had chosen thus to seal up from the knowledge of its woe.

Rachel was incurably mad, but her insanity took a form so gentle, so harmless, so happy, that the few who knew of it and of her could only say, "Thus best!"

Ninian rang at the garden-door. It was opened by Mrs. Forsyth's servant, Jean — the same who had been kind to Rachel at Musselburgh. There was no one else in the house except that faithful old woman who was to her mistress at once mother, nurse, companion, and friend. Jane Sedley came to meet Mr. Græme directly.

"How is Mrs. Sabine to-day?" (They had decided, after long consideration, that it was best to call her by that name. In fact, she would not answer to any other.)

"She is just as usual, poor lamb! Come and see her, Mr. Græme."

"Presently; only first you and I must settle our affairs. It is the first week in April, you know." He and Mrs. Sedley went into a little parlour, and transacted various business-affairs belonging to her whose worldly consciousness was dead for evermore. What matter was it to her that she was the lawful widow of the rich Geoffrey Ulverston, and that but for her insanity she would have succeeded to all that Hope and little Walter once enjoyed? Yet when Ninian, who from the first had arranged everything for her with the heir, Sir Peter, month by month dealt out her ample allowance, taking care she should have all comforts and pleasures that her

clouded mind could know — he felt glad to think that the one who had once possessed these things was living in his home at The Gowans, utterly destitute, dependent upon himself for every necessary of life. He rejoiced that from the hour Hope knew of the cruel wrong done her — a wrong concerning which she herself never uttered a bitter word — not for one penny, either in his life or death, had she been indebted to the man whom she once believed her husband.

"Sir Peter was in Edinburgh a week ago," observed Mr. Græme, as he and Jane Sedley concluded their business. "He would have called here to pay respect to his cousin's widow, but I said how useless it was. Besides, she would remember nothing — not even the name. I told him how she persisted in calling herself Mrs. Sabine."

"Ah, poor dear!" sighed the faithful servant.

"He seemed sorry at first that she should not go by her proper name, but afterwards agreed that as there were no children, and no hope remained of her ever recovering — all these things were best left as when Mr. Ulverston died, hushed up from the knowledge of the world. It would do no harm to any one, and would save one to whom Lady Ulverston was much attached. Are you satisfied, Mrs. Sedley?" he added, with a considerate and friendly air. Truly the good old woman had a right to be treated as an equal.

"Yes, Mr. Græme," she said. "Everything you do is right and good; and kind to my poor mistress." Without saying more, she led the way into the garden where Rachel sat. The impassioned girl — the frenzied wife — the severe, coldly beautiful woman — the magnificent actress who from her renown had dropped suddenly, the

world's waves closing over her head in an oblivion as entire as though she had never been — all had sank to this! — A quiet, pale, listless creature, with a face rarely sad, and often dressed in vacant smiles, was walking slowly up and down the garden-walks, pulling leaves to pieces, talking to herself, sometimes stopping abruptly, and listening to carriage-wheels or footsteps without the wall, whose boundary shut her out from the noisy world of life — for ever! Ninian came up to her, and she held out her hand cheerfully.

"Ah, it is you? You have been a good while away. Any letter from my husband?"

"Not yet," he said, in a low voice. "It is not time."

"Ah, true; I always forget what Geoffrey told me of the continental post. But still it is a long while to wait. — Isn't that a mavis now? It's singing among the apple-blossoms." — And she ran off with childish eagerness, but soon came back. "I would so like to climb that tree and find the mavis's nest, as I used to do. But Mr. Sabine would not like it, you know. I was only a poor girl then; now I must try to make myself a lady, such as his wife should be. He will not love me else." She said this, talking to herself; but turning suddenly again perceived Ninian.

"Who are you? I know your face; but though you come so often I can't remember your name." — "Ninian Græme."

"Ninian Græme," she repeated. "It's pretty enough. I heard it somewhere, I think, but I cannot tell." And the vacancy of her eyes showed her mind was wandering more than usual. Suddenly she came back to the old subject.

whisper. "Don't you see my husband is asleep? And I, too, am so tired — so tired."

She touched gently the brown hair of the dead man — Ninian had turned the face away — and laid her cheek again on the pillow.

"He has been very ill, you know. He will sleep a long time yet, I hope. You had better go away and leave us."

Ninian was startled, — except that it was possible this misery might have stunned her faculties for the moment, and made her hysterical or delirious. He felt her wrist, but its pulses were quite calm. He determined to arouse her to the truth.

"Your husband is not asleep, Rachel," said he, sorrowfully. "Look at him — touch him. Now, my poor girl, do you understand?"

She leaned over, and looked long at the face, whose muscles were slowly settling into repose. Despite the hue of death, the thick brown hair and curling beard, hiding the fallen mouth, gave it a lifelike aspect.

Rachel smiled fondly. "How very handsome Geoffrey looks when he is asleep! I always told him so." She stooped, kissed the forehead, and for a moment drew back.

"He is very cold — but so am I too," and she shivered. "This is such a hard winter; my feet were quite frozen in the snow as I came."

"Rachel — listen to me."

But she only motioned him to be silent, and took her place beside the bed, holding one of the lifeless hands with a contented, unconscious smile.

There was a noise at the door; Jane Sedley tottered in, and ran hastily towards her mistress, sobbing.

"My darling! I could not find you before, and now they tell me it is too late."

"Oh no," she whispered, cheerfully. "Not at all too late. He has wanted nothing; you see he is sound asleep."

Ninian and the old servant looked at one another, and then at the wretched wife — the widow now — who sat smiling at them both. The expression of that vacant smile could not be mistaken. The shock had brought back the disease latent in her brain; — she was once more mad.

Mr. Græme, awe-struck by the spectacle, could find no words; Jane Sedley clung to her beloved mistress, weeping as if her faithful heart were like to break.

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"What o'clock is it?"

It was early morning, almost daybreak. They told her so. She seemed troubled.

"Ah! — and he will not wake — and I must be going soon!"

about his own country, living humbly in Highland glens and Lowland villages, writing hard for daily bread; since he would never suffer his elder brother to aid him in any way. But Ninian knew that work was happiness, and while he watched over the young man continually, still he let him fulfil a young man's best duty — honourable toil.

Once — Edmund, restlessly thirsting for new scenes, had even crossed the ocean to America. Thence he accidentally brought back news, that an Englishman named Ansted had created a great sensation at Saratoga Springs, and been on the point of marriage with a Virginian planter's widow, until one night he was found dead of apoplexy, leaving only money enough to lay him in a stranger's grave. Thus Hope was an orphan. The tie through life unfulfilled or betrayed, ceased, as all such ties must, without much sense of loss or pain. But death solemnised it to that gentle spirit, and Hope had truly mourned for her father.

"I wonder where the boy is now," thought Ninian, as he swung-to and fastened the gate — always in old times a cause of domestic difference between him and the thoughtless Edmund, whose laziness perpetually admitted four-footed beasts to trample upon his brother's precious flowers. "I wish he would cease roaming, and settle somewhere. But he must have his way!" Thus pondering, Mr. Græme let himself into the house as usual; he would never allow his women-kind to sit up for him. But often, when he had chanced to be late, he had seen a light still burning in Hope's room, as if she were uneasy until she heard him come safe home. Not seeing it to-night, he felt rather disappointed, and walked slowly toward the parlour.

A happy twain were sitting there — Lindsay and her "boy." Edmund had come home. He was leaning in his elder brother's arm-chair, in his old attitude of gazing thoughtfully into the fire, which lit up every line of his beautiful face. Beautiful it was still, but with the grave, composed beauty of manhood. Edmund was twenty-five years old now.

At the sound of Ninian's footstep he rose up and met him at the door. The brothers grasped each other's hands warmly, in the silent greeting of men and equals. Edmund had ceased to be a pet, except Lindsay's pet, which he would remain as long as that loving sister lived. But even she began to view him with awe and respect, as though in his fully-formed character and dignity of acknowledged genius he were growing beyond her caressing affection.

"You two were talking very seriously when I came in," observed Ninian, when the first glad welcome was over. "What was it all about? Any news, Edmund? Any more successes for the Great Man of the Family?" Lindsay's eyes were flooded with delight; Edmund himself smiled, but with the serious joy of a man who knows that whatever heights his genius may climb, there is a greater height beyond.

"Yes, brother," he said, "I have been very successful. I have toiled hard in necessary work that I did not like; I have attained what I wanted — I have published my poem."

"Brave boy! And what does the world say of it?" Edmund's lip trembled as with modest air, humble as true genius should ever be, he told what the world did say; how to him had chanced, what scarcely happens

once in a century, — but nevertheless does so happen sometimes, and has done to one of our own day — that his first essay had placed him at once among the brotherhood of poets. Not rhymers for the mere hour, but Poets. He had indeed become the Great Man of the Family.

"And was that what you and Lindsay were looking so grave about?" asked Ninian, trying to smile away the emotion that made his eyes moisten as he looked proudly on the brother he had reared — nay more, had saved from destruction and guided to honour. Miss Græme explained that they were talking about a plan of Edmund's. He wished to return once more to the great home of labour and of genius, — London.

As she spoke, the colour rose in Edmund's face. Afterwards he said, humbly, "Brother, will you let me go?"

"Yes," the brother answered, — "fully, freely."

"I shall go not only to be a poet," Edmund continued. "I know well that one must live, and that it is no disgrace to labour for bread in the ordinary work of literature, giving the rarest and best fruits of one's mind to those writings which we esteem the highest. Thus I shall neither starve, nor dream away my life," he blushed deeply — and then looked fearlessly into his brother's eyes — his brother who wholly trusted him now — "nor be led into dishonour. Only, as a safeguard against all temptation, folly and laziness, I want somebody to take care of me."

"A wife?" smiled Ninian.

"No," was the steady but rather sad answer. "I shall never marry. Poets are best alone." The young man had outlived his youthful dreams, yet their

sting remained in his soul. So it might for some time longer, but not for ever. Ninian knew that, and was content.

"I'll tell you whom I want," continued Edmund, after a pause. "I want my sister Lindsay."

"And I said — and say," Lindsay herself added, softly, "that not even for this boy can I leave my brother Ninian, while Ninian is unmarried." There was a light meaning in her tone which startled Mr. Græme. His heart's pulses rose like a torrent, and then he grew very white.

"I — I cannot talk much now. We will wait till to-morrow." So, very soon the conversation ceased, and there fell silence and sleep over every chamber in the house — save one.

CHAPTER XX.

THERE was great mirth on the christening-day — more so than the simple Scottish home baptism usually creates. But there was the joy of a complete family reunion — now becoming rarer each year, as each member was scattered far and wide; and there was the great honour of Tinie's boy being the first boy — the only nephew vouchsafed to the elders dwelling at The Gowans. Thereupon Mrs. William and Mrs. Patrick Frazer were slightly jealous, except that their own juvenile brood certainly made up in quantity what was wanting in quality.

The naming of the little hero was a grand difficulty. All had supposed that he would bear the paternal appellation, until Mrs. Reay declared that "old Kenneth" and "young Kenneth" would be perfectly abhorrent to her feelings. Then there was a proposition for "Ninian," which the original owner of the name decidedly opposed. Finally the matter was left in doubt. Tinie privately informed Hope that she should keep to their agreement, and that the boy should bear whatsoever name she chose. But no one spoke or hinted at it until the time came. Living so retired during these two years, Hope had not before now met all the family at once. Some of them viewed her — who had been so singled out for misfortune — with a good deal of awe and shyness,

until they saw how very quiet and mild she was. Esther whispered to Ruth, "It was a wonder and a blessing that poor Hope had so well got over it."

Got over it! Strangely do people talk of "getting over" a great sorrow — over-leaping it, passing it by, thrusting it into oblivion. Not so! No one ever does that — at least no nature which can be touched by the feeling of grief at all. The only way is to pass through the ocean of affliction, solemnly, slowly, with humility and faith — as the Israelites passed through the sea. Then its very waves of misery will divide and become to us a wall on the right side and on the left, until the gulf narrows and narrows before eyes, and we land safe on the opposite shore. Thus had Hope landed, and found rest.

Therefore, after this lapse of time, she could smile among her adopted sisters, nor in any way trouble their happiness with the misfortunes that had fallen to her own lot. The only visible difference between her and them was in her more subdued manner, and her well-worn black dress.

"I thought Hope would have put off her mourning," whispered Mrs. Patrick to Mrs. William Frazer. "She has really worn it quite long enough, and it looks so melancholy."

Hope asked what they were saying? — "Don't mind them, dear," answered Mrs. Reay. "It was only about this;" and she touched the obnoxious dress. "They think black is unlucky at a baptism. But I don't care; and I'm baby's mamma, — not they, you know."

Hope said nothing; but when she came down to join

in the ceremony, they noticed she had changed her mourning dress for one of white. Lindsay noticed too — and Lindsay only — that her eyelids were a little reddened, showing that what she had done was not done without emotion. But otherwise her aspect was quiet and content. Ninian, coming in the room late, saw her, and started — she looked so like the little Hope Ansted of old. The sight of her made his strong heart reel.

He went near her as she stood at the window, and touched her dress — "I hardly knew you; how is this?" — Her lip quivered slightly. "They wished it, and it matters little; the feeling is the same." — Ninian said no more.

And now came up the proud and happy Professor, to advertise her that he was about to present his little son to the minister. Hope followed to the circle that stood round the table.

"What is the wee fellow's name to be?" whispered Kenneth Reay. Somehow, with an instinct of sympathy, no one looked at Hope while she answered — perhaps more than one guessed what that answer would be. It was given in a low tone; but very clear.

"Call him — *Walter*." And the boy was so called.

No one of the family made any remark thereupon, though many a time during the day they saw the childless mother steal aside with Tinie's boy in her arms — to kiss him and cry over him, but softly, as if there was more of tender memory than of grief in her tears. Towards evening, the whole party — such a family party as The Gowans had never witnessed before — grew

very blithe; so blithe that the elder brother crept quietly away and hid himself in his study.

Thither he had not been long when there came a gentle tap at the door — one that had used to come years ago, making him start and tremble, — as he did now. Hope spoke, standing at the threshold.

"May I come in and talk to you for a little?"

He said "Yes," mechanically, and then would have given worlds to have retracted that permission. She came and placed herself on the little sofa under the window. It was open, admitting both the air and sun of the first of real spring evenings; Ninian closed it instinctively, saying something about her taking cold.

"How kind — how thoughtful you always are over me!" sighed Hope; and then resolutely began again, — "I had best say at once what I wanted to say to you."

"Say it, then," he answered, and sat down opposite, trying to prepare himself for anything.

"Edmund has been telling me what you three were talking about after I went to bed last night."

"Of his success, I suppose?"

"Yes — and of his desire that Lindsay should go and live with him in London. He asked me to urge you to let her go." — "Indeed!"

"Would you object to that, dear brother? Would you not like this plan to be carried out? It seems a very good plan, in all but the parting with Lindsay. And yet, she would be content anywhere, if it were for Edmund's good. I asked her this, and she said, 'Yes, if

she knew that you were happy too. Should you not be happy?" Ninian made no intelligible answer, and her innocent pleading continued:

"It might not be for long, you know. Edmund may marry, and then Lindsay would come back again. And, meanwhile —" Here she hesitated, but so slightly as to show her utter ignorance of the world, or else her simple heart's thorough confidence in itself — "Meanwhile, you would not be left desolate, or sisterless. I would take as much care of you as ever Lindsay did."

He looked wildly into her guileless eyes. She was evidently quite sincere in what she said — she meant merely that, and no more.

"Besides," she continued, apparently reassured by meeting no contradiction, "the twins would be living near us, so you would not be dull, even alone with me. And, if I must speak of what you never suffer me to think, — it would ease my mind to know I was somewhat useful, and no longer a burden to you. I would be a good housekeeper, and a cheerful sister — indeed I would!" Ninian was still silent.

"Will you consent? May I tell Edmund so?"

"No, Hope; you do not know what you are asking. It cannot be."

His voice, hollow and cold, half frightened the gentle petitioner; but still she asked, timidly, "Why not?"

"Is it possible you do not see?" Perhaps some dawning of the truth then visited her, for her colour slightly rose.

Ninian went on desperately, "Do you not see that

the world will not think as you think; that if Lindsay goes, *you* cannot stay and live with me here alone, being — not my sister?"

Deeper Hope's blush grew, dying cheek, throat, and brow all scarlet. If he had seen her! — but he did not — he had put his hand over his eyes. After a while hers were raised to look at him; there was in them a new expression — half reserve, half pain — mingled with something deeper than both.

"Then I must go away?" Ninian replied not. Something in her tone, and more than that, in the agony of his own mind, made him feel that the crisis of his destiny was come; that, after this, they could no more go on like brother and sister, as heretofore. Hope added, in a subdued accent, "Perhaps, in any case, it is better I should go away. I have been to you a great burden and great care. And though not really my brother, you have been as such, and more — to me. God bless you!"

Her voice faltered; she seemed to struggle against tears. Yet still he was silent, and his silence made her shrink into composure. She half rose to leave the room.

"I will not detain you any longer now. Only the first time you have to spare, give me your advice — your brotherly advice — as to what I ought to do; whether I shall be a governess, or companion, or what?"

"Hush! hush!" he groaned, holding out his hand to her, but turning his head away. — Hope's courage broke down. "Oh, it is a hard, hard world, my brother! I

thought you would have always taken care of me and that I should have lived content with you at The Gowans!"

Ninian grasped tightly the hand he held. He looked her steadily in the face, as he said, "Hope, if you will — there is one way." She guessed what he meant — any woman would. But it was his words only she discerned, not his heart. She turned very pale, and let his hand fall.

"I understand," said Ninian, slowly. "You feel — I thought you would — that *that* is impossible. Forgive me!" There was a heavy silence for some minutes. At last Hope said, "I know not why you ask me to forgive you. It is I who should say that. I feel how noble, how generous, this is of you. All these years you have been making many sacrifices for me, and now you would sacrifice — *yourself*." Ninian started wildly.

"Don't speak — I know it is thus. But I will not suffer it. No man shall ever degrade himself by marrying *me*" — and her voice shook — "least of all you, the best man I ever knew. You must choose some one who is happy and honoured in the sight of the world; also — some one whom you love."

"Some one whom I love!" he repeated, hoarsely. He saw her, as if through a misty dream — standing beside his chair — her tears fast falling, though she spoke so quietly. Once more, by an irresistible impulse, he grasped her hand. "Stay here only a little — do not be afraid of me, my sister."

"I am not afraid," she said, softly, and kept her place.

"Stay, and I will tell you about — some one whom I loved. It is a long time ago, you will hardly remember it. I was a grown man — nay, almost old — and she was quite a girl. I could not marry, or if I could, she did not care for me. So I never told her of my love — not one word. I used to carry her in my arms, and pet her, and call her 'my child,' and 'my darling.' But she knew nothing — nothing!" He felt Hope's hand trembling — but still he held it tight.

"I am glad it was so! I am glad she did not know! It might have grieved her when it was too late, or — afterwards she might not have been willing to come to me in her trouble, for safety, and comfort, and tenderness. She received it as being quite natural, kind, and brotherly — whilst I — Oh my God! Thou knowest all." His voice ceased — its utterance was choked. Hope, thoroughly overwhelmed by his words, sunk lower and lower, until she was kneeling beside him.

A sudden fear struck Ninian. "Do not mistake me," he cried. "I did this with no vain hope; I had none from the first — I have none now. I know she will never care for me, except in her own quiet sisterly way. She will not cease from that, surely?" And he pressed the little hand between both his. Hope bent her head and sobbed.

"My child," he said — using the word he had never used since she was married. "If it had been possible — if you had known this —"

"O that I had, years ago!"

"Would you — answer solemnly, for it is an awful answer to me — would you have loved me then?"

"I might, if you had tried — but I cannot tell." She spoke wildly amid her sobs; her agitation was becoming so intense, that, seeing it, Ninian forgot all his own. He put his left hand on her head.

"My child," he repeated, "my dear child, do not think about this any more. I am getting an old man, and people do not suffer so much when they are old. I will try to love you then, in the quiet way that you would like me to love you — Shall it be so?"

"I am not worthy — not half worthy," she cried. But upon his hand — the strong hand which had upheld and guided her so long — her small soft lips were tremblingly pressed. Ninian drew back — all the man in him was shaken.

"Hope," he said, in a low, quivering voice, "we must not trifle now — but decide one way or the other. If you will keep me as your brother, we must part altogether for a year or two, and afterwards I will learn to meet you as I ought. If, by any possible chance, you could take me as — your husband —" He paused, but she recoiled not — she did not even remove her cheek from his hand.

"If so, and you could be content to let me love you, I would spend my life in making you happy. My child — my little Hope!" and the agony of his tone changed into the music of infinite tenderness — "I would take such care of you — I would hide you in my arms, as I did long ago, and keep every trouble from you. My love — my darling! — will she come?" While he spoke, Hope's sobbing had gradually ceased. She looked up to him — this man, so good, so true, whom for years

she had reverenced, trusted, loved — with a love that perhaps one betrayal of feeling on his part might once have changed into the very love he now sought.

"Will she come?" Ninian repeated, holding out his arms. She came. Slowly and softly she crept to his bosom, and lay there — still weeping, but at rest.

* * * *

They were married not many weeks after, just before Lindsay and Edmund went away. It was a marriage quite private, none even of their own family being present, except Miss Græme, Edmund, and the Reays. John Forsyth was the minister. There was no wedding journey neither, for Ninian had not time. Nor was there any new home chosen whereto to bring his wife; neither of them wished to leave The Gowans. Little outward change would the marriage cause, except the blessed change within of hope for desolation, and peace for mourning. Even joy might come, in time.

On the evening of that day the Reays went home to Portobello, taking with them Lindsay and Edmund, on a brief visit, before the latter left for the south. Ninian went with them to the gate, and came back again. He had been silent and grave all day — very grave for a bridegroom. He looked pale, and even exhausted, as he threw himself in his arm-chair, and softly called to Hope, who was sitting in her favourite place by the window.

She obeyed, as she had been long accustomed to obey him; it was no new lesson to be learnt now. She came and knelt beside him. He took her hands, and held her firmly — but far apart from him, so that he could look into her face.

"Tell me truly, is my darling content?" Their eyes met; hers were laden with the fulness of reverent love, such love as, wife and mother though she had been, she had never really known until now.

"Quite content, *Ninian*," she whispered, calling him for the first time by his Christian name. Ninian Græme lifted her up, little creature as she was, and folded — nay, almost buried her in his breast. And as his wife hid her face there, she felt on her cheek and neck not only his kisses but his tears.

THE END.

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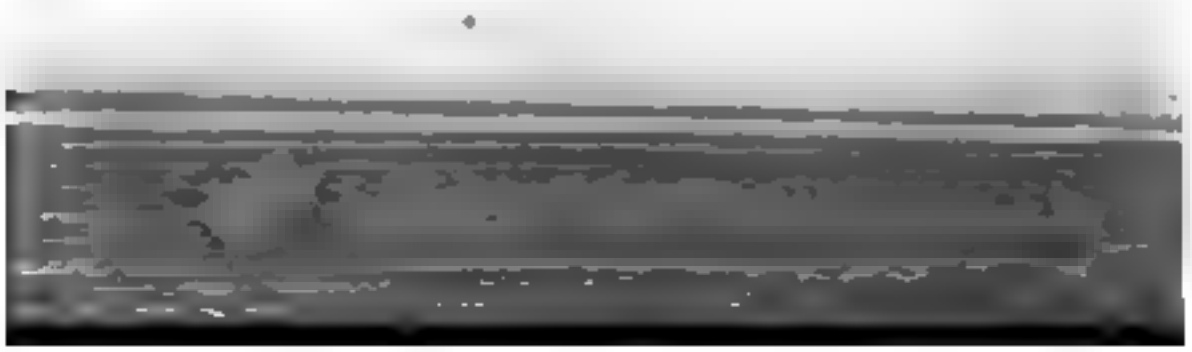

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